SOVIET LITERATURE YESTERDAY TODAY AND TOMORROW

YURI KUZMENKO

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ЮРИЙ КУЗЬМЕНКО

СОВЕТСКАЯ ЛИТЕРАТУРА ВЧЕРА, СЕГОДНЯ, ЗАВТРА

На английском языке

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THE AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

For the writer of a book the reader is always rather an enigma, even the home reader speaking the same tongue and all the more so, the foreign one living in another social and cultural milieu. And so before launching this book on a long and unpredictable voyage, I should like to say a few words about the nature and object of my research.

It is no secret that, generally speaking, Soviet literature is little known in the English-speaking world. Winds of the cold war blow from West to East and it is hard enough getting industrial products through, let alone cultural ones. What's more, the Muses cetrainly do tend to keep silent when guns are fired and it appears these guns (and rockets) make themselves heard without actually going off. They do so with the help of the mass media which do much to see that the Muses keep silent...

I apologise for bringing up politics but I find it hard to keep calm when I think of the vast reserves of cultural contacts which are being wasted. A literature in seventy-seven languages, which has gained considerable artistic value during the many decades of its history, is indeed alive and flourishing. It comprises books re-creating the life of a nation of nearly three hundred million in a talented and realistic manner, and reflecting the unprecedented experience of a reconstructed social system. And it is a great pity that the Western reader so rarely gets a chance to read the works of Soviet writers. What's more, for years invisible conductors have been trying to extract only discords, only dissident voices from the complex, rich and harmonious choir of Soviet literature.

I sometimes read articles about Soviet literature in the American journal *Problems of Communism* and various other publications. These articles, which are written both by professionals with a sound knowledge of their subject and by blundering amateurs, leave a dismal impression of Soviet literature. An image is conjured of a scorching-hot arid desert devoid of life except for a few puny, leafless bushes, and if we come across a blooming oasis, we know beforehand that it lies in different territory and is inhabited only by dissident writers.

Although I realised long ago that articles of this type are written by political stooges rather than literary critics, I still never cease to wonder at how unscientific their methodology is. If we are to believe these articles, there is only one explanation for the changes in Soviet

culture: everything in Soviet literature, past and present, is determined merely by the changes in Party leadership and by the "frosts" and "thaws" in the authorities' relations with writers and artists. The bias of such a theory is blatantly obvious.

And this brings me to the main point I want to make about my book's content. My object has been to show that the development of Soviet literature has been governed by *socially determined factors* and that its changes, past and present, are the result of *natural laws*. I by no means deny the significance (positive or negative) of cultural politics, and the conditions in which writers work and publish their writings, for the literary process, but, as a researcher, I am firmly convinced that the main source of literary development is objective reality, that is, the changes in a nation's life and the appearance of new needs in society.

As I have already mentioned, the cultural life of the Soviet Union is often depicted in the West as a kind of nether world with spry Party officials boiling dissident artists in cauldrons. I do not, however, wish to go to the other extreme and depict a blue sky and puffy white clouds with angelic writers flitting between them. The real process of literary development, like that of society as a whole, is by no means idyllic. There have been errors, difficulties and conflicts during this process and the researcher's task is to understand their nature and show their place in the general picture of literary and social life.

It is my conviction, which is substantiated in detail in this book, that the inner movement of Soviet literature is linked, first and foremost, to two specific periods in the history of our society: that of the formation of a new social structure, which took place in the first half of the century, and that of developed socialism, which began in the 60s. These are the periods into which I intend to divide the history of Soviet literature. In the first important stage I shall be examining the literature of the 20s to 40s. The 50s mark a transitional phase in the literary process from the first to the second stage. Next comes the second, present stage (the 60s to 80s). I shall conclude by attempting to foresee the character and some of the trends in the development of literature in the 80s and 90s.

Chapter One
MAINSTAYS

1. THE MOTIVE FORCE OF THE LITERARY PROCESS

As a rule, the reader does not notice changes in literature. Immersed in its stream, he drifts along with the current and sees events of literary life during only a limited space of time. It is entirely different for a specialist in the theory and history of literature who regards its present state as the result of a complex process lasting many centuries, in the course of which all the aspects of literature have undergone profound changes.

You do not necessarily have to go back to Homer to discover the historic mobility of literature. In fact, you get a good enough idea of it by examining the six decades over which Soviet literature has taken shape.

In the 20s the epic prevailed in prose, poetry and drama, taking precedence over lyricism and psychological realism.

In the 30s novels appeared of an entirely new genre which became known as "epic novels"; the historical novel was also in the ascent.

In the 40s lyrics and the epic permeated one another, giving rise to entirely new lyrical epic novellas, poems and plays.

In the 50s the public's attention was focused on prose genres which had no exact equivalent in English literature: the social essay and long story (something half-way between the novella and novel).

The 60s and 70s saw more lyrics and less epic works; the intensive development of edifying and analytical psychological prose; the erasing of the boundaries between genres; a new upsurge of the historical novel; the prevalence of the novella on contemporary topics...

It is of the utmost importance to understand why these changes have taken place and are continuing to do so, just as it is

to find a way of exlpaining why literature is constantly evolving, developing and changing in form and genre.

In our search for the answer to these questions, we shall be on the right track if we bear in mind the relative independence of literature and art and the presence of inner natural laws governing the literary process, including a distinctive phenomenon called the exhaustion of a genre. Sometimes a certain genre becomes increasingly popular and fashionable and then wears itself out and sinks into oblivion for a while. It is under the influence of the specific natural laws governing them, along with other factors, that prose, poetry and drama develop and sometimes come to the fore in turn and gain the greatest public acclaim.

However, this is only part of the answer, what's more, not the most important part. You do not have to be a Marxist to realise and assert with confidence that it is the very history of human society that acts as the main motive force of literature and art.

Thousands of "nerves" and "blood vessels" join art to the social organism as a whole. In one way or another, literally everything exerts influence on the condition of art and its tendencies to develop: the social system; its class structure; economy, politics, ideology; changing social attitudes; the goals which a nation sets itself at a given moment or even their absence; a nation's level of education and culture; the stormy or relatively calm atmosphere of social life; the general situation in the world...

I have due respect for the structural analysis of literary texts which so many specialists now go in for. However, structurologists make life easier for themselves by anlysing these texts in isolation, without regard for the external world reflected and imprinted in them. It is far more difficult to analyse the structure of the entire literary process over many centuries and disclose the cross-connection of the countless socio-historical forces at work in it.

Most researchers would agree that the development of literature is a socially determined process but as soon as one elaborates on this statement, various basic differences of opinion crop up.

Exactly how and through what connecting links does the external world exert influence on the development of literature? Among the very many factors influencing creative writing are there any that could be considered decisive? What's more, is it possible to discover *one* specific socio-historical factor to whose change literature reacts particularly sensitively? Are there, in fact, immutable *laws* of mutual influence between socio-historical and literary development which enable one to say for sure that if such and such changes were to take place in society, literature would be bound to react in one particular way and not another? Or is it impossible to predict this reaction in as far as each time a new range of social factors combined with many fortuitous circumstances are in action?

During the 20s our science went through a period of crude sociologism. Its adherents had a very primitive and narrow concept of the socially determined nature of creative writing, which they mistook for Marxism. What interested them primarily was the writer's class origin and the milieu he was brought up in. Once this was established, the writer was placed in a specific social category and his writings were thereafter examined as an expression of the ideology and class psychology of, for instance, the landed gentry, officialdom or petty bourgeoisie. Everything in this classification was clear-cut except for one point: why the works of Shakespeare and other great writers of the past continued to be popular although the classes they represented had long since sunk into oblivion.

Nowadays we are well aware that the relations between art and reality are far more complex. Factors of a concrete historical and intransient, individual and general, class and universal nature are all united and interwoven in art. Art is now scientifically defined as a unique, loosely connected, diffuse system. There is no doubt about the existence of laws in art, including those of its interaction with external socio-historical processes, but these laws are not of an absolute and rigid nature and are only manifest over long periods of time when their general features become more distinct and when the various deviations and fortuitous circumstances cancel each other out, so to speak, and become less apparent.

One should point out that the issue of the socially determined

character of artistic development is not one of the best elaborated in Soviet science. There is no doubt that such a determined character exists but the question of how it manifests itself and how its laws actually work is usually touched upon only briefly in aesthetics courses and theoretical art publications. In point of fact, the socially determined principle is merely stated without being analysed in detail even in the articles of the multi-volume Academic histories of Soviet literature.

There are various views on the feasibility of selecting one main factor epitomising the influence exerted on art by the outer world. Those who do consider it feasible look for it in the social history of an age and in the socio-political climate characterising every age.

Where might the socio-historical and literary processes come into the closest contact? Obviously, in a sphere where they both have something genuinely in common. We should, thus, look for the confine between the specific realm of art, on the one hand, and the intrinsic substance of social development on the other.

Generally speaking, this confine was discoverd and named long ago: it was man as a social being, changing in the course of social progress. As the German poet, Johannes R. Becher, said eloquently, "New art never begins with new forms: new art is born with new man."[1]

This profound idea has been substantiated throughout the entire history of art. One may make his formula more accurate only in one instance, translating it into the jargon of scientific concepts: cardinal changes occur in art when new relations are formed between man and objective reality. The reason being that neither in life nor in art is man ever a self-contained entity. He is always seen in relation to the world, to the external conditions to which he conforms his activity, and the circumstances determining his possibilities.

I am fully aware that the statements I have just made sound like an hypothesis for the time being. It all seems logical enough but just how scientific is it? And is it confirmed by art in practice?

Although I run the risk of losing those of my readers who dislike theories, I should nevertheless like to continue my quest for the

mainstays of my subsequent research. Let us very briefly look at how this hypothesis is correlated with the findings of sociology and aesthetics, and with the history of world literature.

2. THE FORMULA OF MAN

It would seem obvious that of all the diverse socio-historical processes, the most specific and important for literature, closely bound to it, are the *changing relations between man and the world.* And now we pass on to a series of questions connected directly to these relations. What do they depend on? What causes them to change? Are they subject to any laws?

Homo sapiens—man as a thinking being may be examined from various angles. In this study we are most interested in the angle of approach which enables us to see and evaluate man as the object of history and its maker.

Only man is capable of creating an ideal image of the world about him and of seeing the world both the way it really is and how, in his view, it ought to be. The discrepancy between reality and the ideal gives rise to an aspiration in man, at times vague and unconscious and at others strong and well-conceived, to remove or at least lessen this discrepancy, to bring something new into the world. However, this creative urge of the personality unfolds in definite socio-historical conditions and is confronted by numerous obstacles in its way. Just as man challenges the world about him, so the world challenges him, too. As history indicates, the outcome of this duel varies. When many people combine efforts, they sometimes succeed in undermining established conventions and giving a powerful spur to the progress of society. At other instances, however, man's creative impulses run up against social foundations, customs and relations which prove insurmountable for the time being.

The "formula" of man as a social being takes shape in every historical age (and every country) in keeping with the way in which two opposed forces are correlated: the force of man's creative impact on the world and the force of the world's influence on man. Totally diverse variants are possible here. The most extreme shape two very different types of personality: "creative" and "created" man.

"Creative" man is both the result and active motive force of the revolutionary era of social upsurge and profound social changes. He is involved in circumstances of a far-reaching, general nature and takes part in events on whose outcome the fate of a nation or even all mankind depends. He strives towards a goal which is loftier and more important than his own life. He is free in the highest sense of the word because he is free not simply from various limitations but free to create, act and devote himself entirely to the struggle for the accomplishment of his cherished ideals.

"Created" man is a product of the times in which the pressure of external conditions greatly exceeds the personality's own creative impulses. The horizon is hidden behind clouds, and in the foreground is the milieu which shapes man in its own image. Man's efforts are spent on adapting to the existing circumstances and preserving the remains of his individuality.

On what does the movement of history from one of these extremities to the other depend? What unknown forces prepare man for his "moments of glory" and then again condemn him to the role of "created" man? Is there a future for people's age-long struggle for freedom and the right to social creation?

I shall try and give a brief summary of the way in which Marxism answers these questions.

In the 19th century, when the rapid rate of social changes enabled mankind to rise above its surroundings and get a historical perspective of things, Marx and Engels succeeded in discerning in the highly intricate pattern of world events a "periodic system" explaining mankind's natural transition from one social and economic system to another: a specific type of pristine communism of the primitive society which had existed for thousands of years; a sequence of formations based on the cruel, unjust and so far inevitable division of society into classes, into a privileged minority and oppressed majority—the slave-owning system, feudalism and capitalism; and, finally, mankind's return, so to speak, but on an infinitely higher plane to a classless society and a life free of exploitation of one man by another, free of oppression of some nations by others and free of wars in the communist formation.

At one point it seemed that all one had to do was devise

a new and just way of life and convince everyone of its advantages and then people would automatically become free and happy. Marx, however, proved that good intentions were not enough: mankind still had to cover a long thorny path along which its productive forces would develop in conditions of class antagonism until the problem of removing social injustices could be successfully solved.

The struggle for freedom is as old as mankind itself. This struggle has been complex and hard, and its results have taken shape within the network of many social processes, which sometimes opposed one another. What was progressive in one respect very often turned out to be regressive in another.

The most important point to note here is that as mankind progressed from one formation to another so did freedom. The peasant serf, for instance, was freer than the slave, the industrial worker freer than the peasant serf. And with every twist of the historical spiral more and more people became creatively involved in the building of society. Let us not forget that, according to historical data, even the renowned ancient democracy of Pericles' time applied only to thirty thousand free citizens of Athens out of the city-state's population of four hundred thousand.

The second important point is that the extent of freedom in the history of mankind increased in leaps and bounds and not at an even, regular pace. Its extent increased sharply at the changeover from one formation to another and gradually decreased as the given formation declined and "clamped down" on subsequent development. It is here that the key to the emergence of the different types of relations between man and the world, which have already been mentioned, is chiefly to be sought.

The setting up of every new formation takes an entire age in which one set of social foundations is destroyed and another created in its place and in which the entire system of human relations and ties comes into play. Great goals generate great energy among the masses of people who are drawn into the process of historical creation. A pleiad of outstanding people embodying the aims and aspirations of their age comes into being. According to Marx and Engels (in their first joint work, *The German Ideology*), social relations of this time are the direct result of

individuals' "independent activity". That is why these relations can be seen as "conditions appertaining to their individuality, in no way external to them..."[2] For "creative" man these "organic" relations and conditions open up a sufficiently large area for his free self-expression and development.

As time goes by, the correspondence of social relations and productive forces (including the instruments of production and the producers themselves), which has been established as a result of the revolution, gradually disintegrates. The ever-developing productive forces go on ahead while the more conservative social system, on the contrary, freezes in its existing forms and loses its capacity to develop. The expressive word "ossification" was used by Marx to characterise this stage. The sphere of independent historical activity becomes increasingly narrow, just as the external conditions, which the individual meets in an established form, become more "inorganic". In the historical arena "creative" man is replaced by "created" man, whose lot is only to submit to the circumstances and the demands of his environment.

Man depends on circumstances; circumstances are created by man. These are two aspects of a single process closely connected to and conditioned by one another, but contrary to what one may think, not of equal importance. Depending on concrete social conditions and the stage which a given formation is passing through in its development, history accentuates one or the other aspect of the interaction. Throughout history there has been a kind of "fluctuation" of socio-historical creativity, putting man in various relations with his environment.

For clarity's sake I should like to make one other important definition of historical development, namely, that social formations are not of equal value. Their change is marked by the most profound transformations in production, economy, technology, culture, the general social structure and tenor of life. In comparison with dynamic capitalism, which emerged from the Industrial Revolution, all mankind's previous development seems to have gone at a snail's pace. The boundary between capitalism and communism also has a special character marking the end of a lengthy period of social development in conditions of an antagonistic class struggle, and the start of an era of a class-

less society. It is not fortuitous that Marx called it the boundary between the prehistory and real history of mankind.

Bearing in mind this main distinction between pre-capitalist, capitalist and communist social relations, Marxism singles out three historical stages in the formation of the human personality.

The first stage is that of the "initial integrity" of man, which corresponds to the pre-capitalist formations. At this stage man has still not worked out his relations with the world in full measure or become detached from the material and spiritual environment he has created for himself. The second is that of bourgeois social relations and the capitalist division of labour, which tends to lead to the complete bankruptcy of the individual and general alienation of his creative powers. Familly, communism, which is "the real *appropriation* of the *human* essence by and for man" and "the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e., human) being—a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development. This communism ... equals humanism..."[3] "Free individuality based on the universal development of individuals... This is the third stage."[4]

In very general terms, of course, those are the views of Marx and Engels on the laws governing the formation of the human personality and the reasons for the historical changeability in the relations between man and the world. The theories outlined here were first formulated in the 1840s and since then nobody has offered anything more convincing or valid in this area.

3. DOES ART HAVE A FUTURE?

Let us now look at the relations between man and the world from the point of view of aesthetics.

Just as the dialectic of the interaction between man and reality is law-governed and cognisable, the same must be true of the dialectic of the development of art. It is essential, of course, to discover the link between these two processes and prove the particular sensitivity of art to the slightest changes in stress from "created" to "creative" man.

For a long time an oversimplified view of the object of art

prevailed in aesthetics. It was considered that the object of both science and art was objective reality, the only difference being that science cognises this reality by means of concepts while art does so with artistic images.

It has since become obvious that art has to deal with a special kind of objective and subjective reality, namely with the *relations* between the subject and object, man and the world. In other words, the objects of art (unlike that of science) cannot possibly be separated from its creative subject, from the artist's perception of the world and his aesthetic emotions. An artist's object, for instance, is not simply a snowy forest or bouquet of flowers in a vase standing on a table. It is, in fact, the relationship between man and nature, man and the material world around him, even if it is not the artist's intention to give a portrayal of the other component of this inviolable unity.

There is one other important point to make here.

Art does not simply reveal, reflect, embody and express objective reality. Directly or indirectly, it is continuously drawing a parallel between this reality and what the artist thinks feasible and necessary, which in scientific term is known as the aesthetic ideal. And this ideal, no matter how versatile it may be, always embodies a notion of freedom. The very quality of the relations between art and reality depends on the extent to which this reality answers the ideal of the unlimited, free development of man's inherent physical and spiritual potentialities.

Thus, no matter how we approach this question, the findings of aesthetics show just how important the relations between man and the world are for art. And these relations are not simply an aspect of reality which the artist has to deal with: they make up the specific object of art, which is constantly being compared to the aesthetic ideal.

Has aesthetics discovered any distinct imprint, which the historically changeable relations between man and the world leaves on the development of art? Yes. And it did so at a time when sociology succeeded in revealing the basic laws governing these changes. I am referring to Hegel's *Aesthetics,* whose first edition was completed in 1845 when Marx and Engels were working on their *The German Ideology.*

Hegel was not the first to attempt a theoretical interpreta-

tion of the history of art. Other aestheticians, including Boileau and Lessing, had done so before him. However, only with Hegel did this history become real history, the dialectic of the development of art reflecting the dialectic of the development of reality.

There is no need here for a general appraisal of the contents, significance, inner contradictions and historical role of the great German philosopher's aesthetic doctrine as specialists have already done this in a convincing and detailed manner. I should only like to mention one point in this doctrine: Hegel's views on the influence of various "states of the world" on art. According to Hegel, the "state of the world" (Weltzustand) reflects a definite, historically established type of relationship between man and reality and a definite "possibility of the individual" (Möglichkeit)[5] which has a most direct bearing on the state of culture.

The most favourable for artistic creation, in Hegel's view, was the *heroic* state of the world since, in his opinion, it was precisely in this atmosphere that true classical art once came into being—classical art, which may still serve as a kind of model in our critique of the nature of artistic creation and as a point of departure in our appraisal of contemporary art.

What, then, are the specific features of this heroic state of the world?

The first intrinsic feature of this heroic age is the *profound and complete unity between man and the world.* The heroic individual has already become detached from Nature and has risen above the primitive society's poverty of spiritual interests but has still not broken free of the natural environment, to which he is attached by innumerable bonds. At the same time, the artificial environment satisfying his needs is still, to a considerable extent, the result of his own activity. In this age "the first joy of new discoveries, the freshness of possession, the attainment of pleasure, all congenial to man, pervades everything, and in everything he feels the strength of his muscles, the skill of his hands, the refinement of his mind or the result of his courage". From any point of view the heroic individual "forms an indivisible union with the world of his making and therefore belonging to him".

Another feature of the heroic age is closely linked to this: *the individual's spontaneous independence* in his activity. Ideal heroes "either act in an age when there are still no laws or themselves become the founders of states so that law and order, codes and customs issue from them and exist as their individual cause which is indissolubly connected to them". That is why "the independent, strong and integral heroic character does not want to share the blame and knows nothing about the contraposition of subjective intentions to the objective act"; he "takes full responsibility for all the consequences of his actions".

One other indispensable condition for a heroic state of the world to emerge is *the presence of a high goal* belonging to the nation in question or all mankind. Here the individual "devotes himself entirely to a single goal which he has clearly defined, stated and tried to realise and, depending on the circumstances, either perished or remained alive doing so". "This relentless firmness, man's identity with himself and with his goal issuing from him, makes him a remarkable personality... No laws, neither divine nor human, nothing at all can make him retreat or cease from striving towards his goal." The individuals of the heroic age, who have been united by this goal and are relentlessly striving towards it, "bear the brunt of the entire action" and stand "at the head of the reality in which they are living".

Without trying to conceal his great affection for the art which once emerged from the heroic state of the world, Hegel nevertheless comes to the conclusion that it is an irreversible, past stage in the history of world culture. In his opinion, during the last centuries the heroic age has been irrevocably replaced by a *prosaic* state of the world, that is, by "developed statehood" characterised by regulated and consolidated social norms in state law, the comprehensive division of labour, and the emergence of complex relations between man and society involving many intervening agencies. Such a structure of life, in Hegel's opinion, corresponded to natural laws and was even useful in many ways but not, alas, for art whose ideal norms and traditions are very much at odds with reality.

When the world is in a prosaic state "what has been accom-

plished by separate individuals seems somewhat limited in comparison with the significance of the event as a whole and the size of the goal in whose realisation they are playing a role". The whole is seen by man "only as a mass of details, activities and pursuits divided into an infinite number of parts so that only a trifling part of the whole may fall to the lot of individuals". Man included in the existing relations no longer "proceeds in his actions from his own integrity" and is now the object, not the subject of the historical process. He depends entirely "on outer influences, laws, state institutions, civil relations" and no matter whether "he finds his own inner law in them or something imposed on him from without, he is still forced to yield to them". From whatever angle we approach such an individual who has been imprisoned by external conditions, he does not give us a "picture of independent and integral life and freedom forming the base of the concept of beauty".

Thus, according to Hegel, two "states of the world"—the heroic and prosaic—may be singled out in the history of mankind. The first gave birth centuries ago to an epic art which continues to be an aesthetic standard, an unattainable model of perfection. The latter forms the social base of contemporary art which has undergone profound changes and lost the opportunity of re-creating the aesthetic ideal.

How is Hegel's heroic state of the world interpreted from a Marxist point of view? It is the state of man's "initial integrity", of man who has not yet been marred by modern forms of social oppression and the division of labour; it is the initial stage in the formation of the human personality. The historical foundation of this state is ancient democracy with its mythological creative thinking and later the age of the Renaissance. The prosaic state of the world corresponds to a developed bourgeois society which gives rise to the "private" or "incomplete" individual, to "created" man, bound with all kinds of restrictions.

Thus, Hegel was the first art theoretician to discover that the state of art was indeed deeply conditioned by that of society and to show the decisive role in this conditionality played by qualitatively different types of relations between man and

the world. There is, however, a point on which we cannot agree with the author of immortal lectures on aesthetics: his prediction of art's "self-annihilation" in the foreseeable future, based in his view on the irrevocability of the heroic state of the world.

Hegel carefully studied the devices which art used to try and avoid the prose of life contrasting the ideal and cope with the difficulties which have confronted it. "Shakespeare, for instance, draws material for many of his tragedies from chronicles or old novellas describing a state which has not yet developed fully into a firmly established order." "True, the protagonists of Shakespeare's tragedies do not all belong to the royal court and are partly based on historical and not only mythological material but, to make up for it, they are set in times of civil strife when the bonds of law and order slacken or completely break apart. Thanks to this they once more acquire the independence and freedom of action that are a must for the ideal."

However, these are merely rear-guard battles of culture, which in no way decide the eventual outcome of the battle. All attempts of art to "regain the lost independence of poetic images in the conditions of the new era" are doomed to failure. The individual's deliberate refusal to continue the battle and his withdrawal to "the last stronghold, the *formal* identity of subjective freedom" also fail to produce the desired effect. From the aesthetic viewpoint, "neither this abstraction of purely formal liberation nor the futile struggle against an insurmountable barrier can be considered truly beautiful".

With these considerations in mind, Hegel would pose his lecture audience the following questions: may, in fact, works which do not disclose the liberation of man be considered art in the full sense of the word? And are we entitled to refer to a type of art, art which is denied the opportunity of going beyond the boundaries of mundane prosaic existence? Then he would reply: "If we proceed from the concept of genuinely ideal works of art, the creative works at present will not stand the test."

Hegel's ideas about the changing states of the world clearly detect and express the real contradiction between the progress

of art and that of civilisation. As Mikhail Livschitz, a well-known Soviet researcher of Hegel, writes: "...This was a severe and profound dialectic which regarded as unthinkable a return to lost simplicity in the vein of Rousseau or to the 'intermediary state' of Helvetius and Diderot, lying somewhere between the extremities of primitive society and civilisation."[6]

This allowed for no illusions and showed no prospects. The logic was simple. By its very nature, art cannot help affirming the aesthetic ideal—the ideal of "freedom forming the base of the concept of beauty". However, this ideal is inaccessible in as far as it is inseparably linked with the irretrievably lost heroic state of the world. Consequently, art is doomed; it is also a past stage in the history of man. In the world of all-embracing rationalism and man's complete dependence, art fails to express the "other being of spirit" and it becomes the realm of philosophical thought.

It is obvious how greatly the sociological views of Hegel and Marx differ. Hegel stressed the complete impoverishment of the individual in conditions of the prosaic state of the world and regarded it as the final, ultimate phase of the historical process. After defining this impoverishment as an inevitable and natural stage in human development, Marx revealed the prospects for a transition to a third, higher stage in the shaping of the personality.

It is perfectly clear that the outcome of this debate was of the most vital importance for literature, art and culture in general and truly answered the question "to be, or not to be" once asked by Hamlet. If "the ideal of freedom forming the base of the concept of beauty" is a vestige of antiquity and a consolatory illusion which harsh reality is bound to dispel in the end, then art is indeed losing its prospects for survival. If, however, Marx is right, then the aesthetic ideal (and with it, art itself) may be said to have firm social and historical foundations not only in the past but also in the future.

By finding a theoretical solution to the "enigma of history" Marxism has also solved the "enigma of art", which Hegel disclosed and interpreted in his own way. The proof that the prosaic state of the world is finite, that the overthrow of capitalism gives man boundless opportunities for creative participation in society,

refutes Hegel's forecast concerning the future of art and gives a distinctly different, optimistic prognosis on artistic development.

4. FROM KING LEAR TO LEOPOLD BLOOM

Now let us look at this question from the viewpoint of literature itself.

The history of the capitalist formation gives the most perfect example of the transition from the rise of a social structure to its inner crisis, of two distinct phases in the development of a social formation. We can see for ourselves how the scale of the human personality decreases as the conditions of its vital activity become increasingly "inorganic" and the opportunities for constructive participation in the making of history shrink like Balzac's shagreen leather. Initial integrity is replaced by the catastrophic disintegration and standardisation of the personality. Progress is achieved by restricting man, that is by concentrating his efforts on an exceptionally limited section of the social mechanism or of material production.

How, then, has the centuries-long transition from the heroic state of the world to the prosaic been reflected in European literature?

A whimsical old man who was used to acting on the spur of the moment, handed over his estate to two of his daughters and turned his third daughter, who had once been his favourite, out of the house. However, it soon became evident that the old man had made a grave mistake because, behind their façade of charm and flattery, his rewarded daughters turned out to be spiteful and cunning while his banished daughter had been sincere and forthright with him because of her honest and loving nature...

Retelling Shakespeare's *King Lear* in such an oversimplified manner may make it seem like a petty-bourgeois melodrama. However, the great playwright of the Renaissance had, of course, other creative aims in mind when he turned way back to the 12th century, to the story of the woeful king of Britain and his ungrateful daughters. As in many other instances, this

subject attracted him because it gave him an opportunity to unfurl an epic panorama of the struggle of human passions.

Lear, the absolute ruler of a patriarchal kingdom, has unlimited power. His will and whims are the only motives of his actions. And it is only when his own decision comes into effect that a chain of circumstances is unleashed which he can do nothing about and which inevitably lead to his perdition.

However, the most remarkable element in the epic is not even this freedom of will but the absence of any boundaries between the general and the particular. The heroes of Shakespeare's tragedies deal directly with the foundations of the existing world order and with the general course of events.

Othello believes his wife has been unfaithful. Lear misjudges his daughters. As we are used to dividing things into great and little, general and particular, we tend to regard this, first and foremost, as the heroes' personal dramas. However, we are, in fact, dealing with an epic based on different ideas about life. Othello and Lear regard their relations with their family as a model of human relations in general. Desdemona's "infidelity", Goneril's and Regan's villainy are equivalent to universal tragedies. If these people are like this, it means the rest of the world is, too. Demented by grief, Lear,

> *...Contending with the fretful elements;*
> *Bids the wind blow the earth into the sea,*
> *Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main,*
> *That things might change or cease...*

The tragedy culminates in a sequence of deaths. Goneril and Regan fall victims to their own virulent hatred of each other; Edmund is struck down by the sacred vengeance of his slandered brother; Cordelia is killed; Lear dies. And everything that takes place in the kingdom is again regarded not simply as a particular case of a personal nature but as events which have shaken the very foundations of life in general. "Is this the promis'd end?.." "Fall, and cease!"

Thus, we shall start our brief survey of the history of world literature with the epic tragedy, which, although based on ma-

terial of the remote past, was enthusiastically received by audiences as a reminder of a time when man was more commensurable with the outer world and not too rigidly conditioned by his immediate social environment.

Literary works capable of standing the test of time are by no means written every decade. The early part of the 17th century presented the world with two such works: *Hamlet* was written and staged in England and Cervantes' novel *Don Quixote* appeared in Spain.

Numerous books and articles have been written about two great madmen, Hamlet and Don Quixote. More often than not, they are seen as splendid personifications of two eternal rudiments of human nature—doubt and faith, reflection and enthusiasm, egoism and self-denial, scepticism and loyalty to an ideal. However, this is only part of the truth. The real bonds between these two heroes, that of similarity and difference, may only be found with due regard for the historical and literary situation which they reflected.

The end of the 16th and early 17th century saw the decline of the Renaissance. The era which had given birth to great thinkers and statesmen was receding into the past. Modern states and nations were being formed and a system of early bourgeois relations and interdependent links was being superimposed upon the closely-knit network of old feudal bonds.

Epic artistic consciousness, based on the conviction that man was omnipotent and that the hero and the world were of equal stature, clashed with a new, increasingly ungovernable reality. In actual fact and in man's perception the world was becoming more and more complex and vast and man less and less sure that he could control it. The proud device of the Renaissance, "Man can do all!" was replaced by the anxious question, "What can man do?"

This turning-point and this gap between epic consciousness and reality are reflected in their own way in the immortal works of Shakespeare and Cervantes. Let us imagine the epic hero who suddenly realises that the world is beyond his control. This will be the case in *Hamlet*. Now let us imagine the epic hero of the past who remains true to himself but is now placed

in conditions of another, non-epic reality. This will be the case in *Don Quixote*.

Both Hamlet's motherland, Denmark, and the whole world is a prison for man who wishes to be free. The accursed century makes "calamity of so long life", mocks people and forces them to "grunt and sweat under a weary life". "The oppressor's wrong", "the law's delay", the "insolence of office and the spurns", "this heavy-headed revel, east and west"—this is the inauspicious picture revealed to the eye. The world is prey to terrible unjustices and arbitrary law among which vile regicide for mercenary motives is by no means the worst.

The ghost of Hamlet's father who was poisoned by his brother so that he could take over the throne, calls for revenge. Hamlet, however, still has reservations. It is not enough for him to thrust his sword into the murderer as any epic hero of the past would have done without a moment's hesitation. He has to discover the root of evil, measure the value of human life and come to understand the consequences of the various options open to him. It is not hard to revenge one villain. It is easy to die: "I do not set my life at a pin's fee," says Hamlet. But will his death and his act of vengeance change much in this world and in this age?

The essential difference between Don Quixote and Hamlet is seen not only in their natures: they both act in conditions in which the personality suddenly discovers the world is independent of his will and develops in keeping with its own laws. The tragicomedy of Don Quixote lies in the fact that he has not "noticed" this change and acts in the changed circumstances as if the heroic personality was still in control of events. The epic integrity of his character is preserved only by virtue of his "quixotism", that is, by his remaining in an illusory world of his own making. The tragedy of Hamlet's split personality, his inability to fulfil the demands of his duty automatically, without deliberation, are, on the contrary, the price he pays for apprehending the bitter truth: that the world exists independently, without regard for the wishes of the individual and that man is obliged to adjust all his efforts to the external objective conditions. One could say that Hamlet is a Don Quixote who has discovered the extent of the inequality between

the forces of good and evil, and the futility of his attempts to oppose this evil. And the fact that at the end of the novel and the play the heroes exchange places, as it were, is full of profound tragic irony. Don Quixote recovers his sight and, like Hamlet, plucks up the courage to admit the futility of his efforts. Hamlet, on the other hand, like Don Quixote, rushes with his rapier atilt into a skirmish which he knows he has already lost.

...The end of the 18th century. The world or, more precisely, the Germany of that time had moved even further away from the legendary heroic state and even nearer to the prosaic "developed statehood". Nevertheless, young Schiller sets himself the daring task of creating an epic tragedy, what's more, a tragedy depicting modern man and the unyielding transports of his spirit.

Schiller's drama *The Robbers* appeared in 1781. Almost like *King Lear,* it is about an old father and his children who are his complete opposites as far as their moral characters are concerned. However, Schiller succeeded in creating a certain similarity to the epic situation only by giving reality a romantic gloss and by artificially removing his characters from mundane everyday life. He turned the ordinary villain, Franz, into a personification of evil and demonic destruction, and virtuous Karl into a German version of Robin Hood, the leader of a band of robbers.

At the sight of the rich wheat growing in a peasant's field, Karl starts thinking about the striking incongruity between the practical, material and the spiritual in life. "Why should man succeed in things which make him like an ant and not so well in things, which make him equal to God." He grieves over the fact that people "ruin their healthy nature with banal conventions" and with great vigour condemns to damnation the outgoing 18th century.

What should Karl do, then? Submit to the power of this "feeble century" and act in keeping with its numerous written and unwritten conventions? Certainly not. "Can you imagine me binding myself hand and foot and tying my will with laws? The law makes even those who could fly like an eagle crawl like a snail! The law has not created a single great man; only

freedom gives birth to giants and to lofty impulses." Karl joyfully and enthusiastically accepts the offer to become the leader of a band of robbers. "What a fool I was, craving to go back into a cage! My spirit longs for exploits, my breath yearns for freedom! Murderers, robbers! I hereby defy the law..."

However, the author of *The Robbers* would not have been in the least disconcerted had he been charged of distorting reality. In Schiller's works, as in those of other Romantics, the rejection of life's mundane prose and creation of various kinds of "untypical" circumstances for the characters of various kinds are a reflection of their conscious stand. "This prevalence of prose over poetry in every area of our existence," Schiller wrote to Johann Herder on November 4, 1795, "seems to be so great and decisive that instead of becoming the sovereign of prose, the soul of poetry is inevitably contaminated by it and thus perishes. That is why I see no other way of salvation for men of poetic genius than that of abandoning the sphere of reality and concentrating their efforts on a complete severance of ties with it and not on a dangerous alliance."[7]

In Cervantes' work the hero is conventionalised whereas the vital circumstances in which this hero acts are completely true to life. In the works of the Romantics, however, both poles of literary portrayal become conventionalised. If reality has changed and ceased to answer the aesthetic ideal, so much the worse for it! The Romantics did not wish, on principle, to relinquish the epic scale of human potentialities and readjust their vision of man and the world to the new conditions. However, this rebellion of theirs against the inexorable course of history was, of course, short-lived.

...In 1843 Balzac's novel *Lost Illusions* came out in Paris. And these were, indeed, the lost illusions of not only the naive provincial, Lucien Chardon de Rubempré, but also of literature itself which had made a decisive step towards admitting the actual state of affairs by stipulating its need for complete *reality* in the portrayal of human relations, characters, actions and conflicts.

As soon as he set foot in the capital, Lucien "saw the seamy side of life, just as it is in actual fact". This was the world of total corruption, of frenzied social climbing and money-grab-

bing. "Everything Lucien heard during these two hours concerned money. At the theatre just as at the bookshop and at the newspaper editorial office, there had been no trace of genuine art or true honour. The blows of the press minting coins thumped mercilessly against his head and heart, making him tremble with awe."

However, "instead of being seized with horror at the sight of the very heart of this Parisian corruption", he was charmed by "these extraordinary men under the damask steel of their vices and glinting helmets of their cold analysis" whom "he found superior to the grave and serious men of Cénacle..." A short while later the young provincial became the lover of a charming actress, gained fame with his impertinent theatrical reviews, and convincingly "showed that he knew how to howl with the wolves..."

The minting press, as we see, did not deal its blows on Don Quixote, Hamlet or Karl Moor. Balzac's hero has no intention of sacrificing himself in the struggle against Parisian corruption or of angrily cursing the age of money-grabbing or of escaping from people's cynicism into the Bois de Boulogne. After a brief reconnaissance of the editorial offices and theatrical salons he becomes truly part of the corrupt society, accepting its laws and trying just as hard as everyone else to get his fair share of the pie.

The society in which Lucien moves is still in a highly uncertain and changeable state. Careers, fortunes and reputations are made and lost overnight: the sons of tradesmen become millionaires while men, one day boasting of tremendous power, are bankrupt the next. However, all this frenzied activity takes place, as it were, within a magic circle of sorts, namely within the mortal combat of predators for their share of the prey, which in no way affects the established conditions of existence. The unity of the individual and his milieu, the "equal stature" of the hero and circumstances are therefore on another plane in Balzac's novel and of an entirely different, non-Shakespearian character.

Let us now move on a few decades.

In 1876, amidst an uproar of indignation, Zola's novel *The Snare* began appearing in the French newspaper *Le Bien Pub-*

lic. Its dominant theme is the dream of a Parisian laundress by the name of Gervaise "...to work, have enough bread to eat, live in a small nook all her own, bring up children, not get beaten up and die in her own bed". Gervaise is hard-working, kind and considerate to others. At one time it seemed that her simple dream might very well come true. However, the distilling equipment in old Colombe's tavern does its job well. The iron fetters of need get tighter and tighter: her husband drinks himself to death, her daughter becomes a prostitute and Gervaise herself dies on a heap of dirty rags in a store-room under a staircase.

In *The Snare* Zola wanted, in his own words, "to show the inevitable degeneration of a working family living in the poisoned milieu of our suburbs". "...My characters are not bad, they are simply ignorant and depraved by dire need and misery, by the milieu in which they live."[8] The milieu—this word, repeated twice in the author's short foreword, is invisibly present throughout the novel. The vividly portrayed milieu of the Parisian slums envelops man, pre-determining his behaviour and paralysing whatever attempts he may make to break free of the snare of alcoholism, violence, humiliations and poverty. Human thought proves incapable of penetrating the black mire of such living conditions—the individual is even more maimed and impoverished spiritually than he is physically. Recalling Schiller's words, man here is fatally unsuccessful not only in matters which make him equal to God: the heroine of Zola's novel cannot even cope with her petty "ant-like" cares and concerns.

In the naturalist writer's view, man is no longer an equal partner even of his small private world. He automatically becomes the *function* of the conditions of his existence. This principle of the character's dissolution in his milieu is evident in Zola's novels and even more so in his theoretical works in which he came to significantly narrower and more one-sided conclusions, based on his experience in writing.

Finally, let us turn to the early 1920s when in Paris James Joyce, then a sick, poverty-stricken and almost blind old man, was completing his monumental novel and main work of his life, *Ulysses,* which has exerted considerable influence on the development of literature.

During one day, on June 16, 1904, an advertisement agent of *The Weekly Freemen and National Press* by the name of Leopold Bloom acts out all his life in our presence. He wakes up, cooks breakfast for himself and his wife, buys offal at a local shop, sits in the w.c. with an old newspaper, arranges for an advertisement of the House of Keys to be placed in his newspaper, feeds the seagulls on the promenade, chats to Miss Breen about someone's funeral and about Miss Purefoy whose baby is long overdue, eats a cheese sandwich in Davy Byrne's bar, helps a blindman cross Dawson Street, spots his wife's lover in a crowd, sets off to the library to find a drawing for one of his advertisements... However, all these incidents relate, as it were, to the vast work's underlying meaning. Its main text consists of a bizarre blend of ideas, memories, desultory thoughts and associations, which flash through Bloom's mind as a result of all the pictures, smells and sounds that reach him during the day.

The absence of an inner pivot onto which the personality could hinge, acquires a more ominous nature in Joyce's character than in the Naturalists' hero. Bloom is inwardly chained to the phenomena and things around him, and only they stimulate his thoughts and form his conceptions of life. It even seems that parts of his body function on their own, without any coordinating centre. Bloom hears, sees and feels but his visual and auditory associations exist simultaneously and yet separately in his mind...

There is a game which consists of changing only one letter in a word at one go to form another word. After a few goes, however, this word becomes entirely different and sometimes acquires an opposite meaning. Something similar has happened during our short literary survey.

King Lear; Hamlet, Prince of Denmark; Don Quixote of La Mancha; Karl Moor; Lucien de Rubempré; Gervaise; Leopold Bloom... Only a few characters from famous works of world literature; a short list representing three centuries of literary development. It seems very little had changed from one work to another but their extreme points are, in fact, distances apart.

To make things clearer, here is a list of the types of rela-

tions between man and the world, the character and circumstances as represented by these works:

1. The artistic re-creation of the heroic state of the world: the epic hero in corresponding epic circumstances (Shakespeare's *King Lear*).

2. The epic hero in sharp contrast with the qualitatively new, prosaic reality (Cervantes' *Don Quixote,* Shakespeare's *Hamlet*).

3. The romantic refusal to accept the prosaic state of the world: the conventionalised hero in conventionalised circumstances (Schiller's *The Robbers*).

4. The individual adapting to the existing conventions of life (Balzac's *Lost Illusions*).

5. The absorption of the individual by his milieu; the character's transformation into a passive function of circumstances (Zola's *The Snare*).

6. The character's disintegration, the depiction of the process of the individual's alienation from an alienated standpoint (Joyce's *Ulysses*).

Here we have a typological list in which we discern a certain regularity. It illustrates the movement of world literature, which reflected the change in the state of the world, and the gradual "compression", unremitting like a geological shift, of the circumstances and conditions forming man.

I shall briefly sum up my main points in this chapter.

For all its specific characteristics, the process of literary development is in the long run stipulated and directed by the development of human society.

The complex relations between these two historical processes are determined by many social factors, some of which influence the development of literature directly and others indirectly, through another medium.

Of all the diverse social factors influencing the development of literature, the most significant are the historically changeable relations between man and the world, in as far as these relations are reflected, embodied and produce an aesthetic response in art and are its specific object.

The key to an understanding of the historical dialectic of

the formation of the human personality and its relations with the world is to be found in the natural, law-governed change of social formations as revealed by Marxism.

The socially—and historically-determined character of artistic development is clearly seen in the influence exerted on art by qualitatively different conditions of man's vital activity, which Hegel called the heroic and prosaic states of the world and which have also been elucidated by Marxist sociology...

All this has a direct bearing on the history of Soviet literature. For all its distinctions and specific features, Soviet literature is the natural result of all the social processes which have taken place in the country; it has developed and continues to do so in keeping with the general natural laws of evolution in art. In a certain sense, no matter how strange this might seem, Hegel explains the essence of socialist realism much better than many contemporary theoreticians.

What has happened in Russia in the 20th century? Why are the events of far-off 1917 still reverberating throughout the world? There can only be one true answer: that year marked the start of a new social formation which came to replace the capitalist system.

No sooner had the century begun than the country entered a stormy period of revolutionary activity. One after the other, its waves crushed down on the foundations of old Russian society, until they eventually crumbled. Several decades were required for a new society with its own way of life, its own human relations, laws and traditions to be built on the ruins of the past. In the latter half of the century "developing" socialism acquired the features of "developed", mature socialism and entered a new phase in its development.

Now let us imagine an art historian at the beginning of the 20th century who is, firstly, convinced of the victory of the socialist revolution in Russia and, secondly, knows that art is a socially determined phenomenon governed by laws which have been examined above. What might such a historian say of the future of literature and art?

"We are entering the era of a new social formation introducing exceptionally profound changes in all spheres of life.

This means that the heroic state of the world, known from the distant past, will again become the real state of the people's existence over a long period of time. Such a state of the world is bound to result in the profound transformation of art's aesthetic foundations. Possibly, something will change when socialism acquires the features of a well-established society and enters a regular phase in its existence. However, for the time being one should expect art to appear under the device of 'The epic is dead? Oh no, long live the epic!' "

Of course, no such perceptive art historian was alive at the time. To make up for it, however, there was a politician and sociologist who not only believed in the country's swift social renovation but also did everything in his power to see it come about. And this great statesman said almost the same thing about the prospects of artistic development, stressing the future literature's affinity to the people and its indissoluble bond with the revolutionary transformation of the world: "It will be a free literature, because the idea of socialism and sympathy with the working people and not greed or careerism will bring ever new forces to its ranks. It will be a free literature, because it will serve not some satiated heroine, not the bored upper ten thousand suffering from fatly degeneration, but the millions and tens of millions of working people. . ."[9]

This is an excerpt from Lenin's famous article "Party Organisation and Party Literature" which he wrote in November 1905. His view proved to be a well-grounded and accurate scientific prognosis.

NOTES

1. Johannes R. Becher. *Verteidigung der Poesie. Vom Neuen in der Literatur*, Rutten & Loening, Berlin, 1952, S. 241.
2. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels. "The German Ideology", *Collected Works*, vol. 5, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p. 82.
3. Karl Marx. "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844", *Collected Works*, vol. 3, p. 296.
4. *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Art.* Archival materials in two vols., vol. I, pp. 89-91 (in Russian); Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1975, p. 296.

5. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Ästhetik,* Bd. 1, Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin und Weimar, 1965, S. 196.
6. See : Preface to *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels on Art,* vol. I, p. XIX (in Russian).
7. Friedrich Schiller. *Briefe,* Carl Hanser Verlag, München, 1955, S. 375.
8. Emile Zola. *L'Assommoir,* Troisième édition, Paris, 1877, p. 568.
9. V. I. Lenin. "Party Organisation and Party Literature", *Collected Works,* vol. 10, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1962, pp. 48-49.

Chapter Two

THE DAWN OF A NEW ERA

1. AT THE TURNING-POINT OF TWO AGES

The literary heritage of Maxim Gorky, recognised in this country as the founder of Soviet literature, is vast. Twenty-two of the thirty volumes of his complete works include novels, long and short stories and plays. One of the many great figures of world literature in the late 19th and early 20th century, Gorky fulfilled his own unique mission. Long before the socialist revolution he opened up many new vistas for artistic development, and after the revolution did incredibly much to advance literature and art along these lines and help in the formation of young Soviet literature.

I do not intend to analyse the great Russian writer's long and complex literary life. I shall pause on only one of his works, his play *The Petty Bourgeois* (1901) that marks the turning-point of two centuries, of two ages in the country's history. It is the first of Gorky's works in which a worker enters the stage and in which motifs characteristic of socialist realism resound. Here it is especially evident in what way Gorky continues the creative quests of his forerunners and what new contributions he makes to an understanding of man and his relations with the world.

Let us recall what this time was like. Chiming bells had only just rung in the new 20th century which Russia greeted with particularly great hope. Occasional underground tremors bore witness to the fact that the edifice of the Russian Empire was standing on a dormant volcano. Five years separated the country from the First Russian Revolution, which Nicholas II drowned in blood but was then forced to make various concessions. And after only seventeen years a second social eruption occurred and then a third which overthrew tsarism and marked the dawn of an entirely new life.

Let us now turn to Gorky's first dramatic work which he worked on with particular inspiration. A small provincial town. The house of Vasili Bessemenov, "the elder of a house-painters' guild", which is full of solid old furniture. It is not easy to explain the social position of the master of the house in modern terms. Well, let's say he is something like the co-owner of a small building firm. During the play we meet ten inmates of this house: Bessemenov, his quiet wife Akulina, his daughter Tatyana, a schoolmistress, his son Pyotr, a student expelled from the university, his foster-son Nil, an engine-driver, Bessemenov's distant relative Perchikhin, his daughter Polya and, finally, the lodgers: Yelena, a young widow, Teterev, a church chorister, and Shishkin, a student. All these people come in, go out, meet in different combinations, discuss life, tell each other home truths and sometimes have angry rows.

What is this play about? About the lives and aspirations of inmates of this crowded provincial house?

The play's title (*Meshchane*) which translates badly into English, needs some explaining. Since olden times the inhabitants of any large or small town (*mesto* in Russian) were referred to as "meshchane". However, this did not simply mean "townspeople" but also petty bourgeois people with an average income who lived comfortable, ordered lives and comprised the conservative, stagnant element of society. In German and English this roughly corresponds to the word "Philistine".

The word, first used to denote a particular class, gradually acquired a derogatory connotation. And it was namely in this derogatory sense that Gorky used it. "...The real enemy of life isn't capital..." he wrote at the time, "but its slaves, the respectable petty bourgeois wishing in the interests of their own personal happiness to prove that another system of life is impossible.."[1]

The head of the household, Vasily Bessemenov, is just such a petty bourgeois and Philistine. He has devoted all his adult life to his "business" in which strengthening the social status quo and increasing his personal fortune have proved indivisible. Of course, he does not know and does not even wish to know of any other "system of life". When he first appears on stage, he says to his children, "You don't live our way of liv-

ing, I can see that plain enough, but what new way have you thought of? That's the question." And later he says: "What are you so proud of? What have you ever done to be proud of? As for us, we've lived. And worked. Built houses—for you. . ." "I've sweated my guts out at work for fifty-eight years for my children's sake."

These additions "for you", "for my children's sake" are very typical of him. The meaning of life, as far as Vasili Bessemenov is concerned, is to preserve and instill in his children the tenor of life which he has done his fair share in creating. And what worries him most is that his children are not inclined to follow in his footsteps and live "lawfully". Tatyana is unmarried although she is nearly thirty, and Pyotr does not marry either, and aimlessly whiles away his time although it is high time for him to be thinking about a career. And Nil has got completely out of hand and is slowly drifting further and further away from his family.

Nil really does seem like someone from another planet when he suddenly appears in the gloomy house where people are always moaning and groaning about life. When he comes in after his day's work he is cold and hungry but still full of energy and cheer. He is free in a most unfree society because he does not recognise the right of this society to dictate its conditions to him. "You can't frighten me!" he says to Pyotr. "I know better than you that life is hard, that sometimes it's sickening cruel, that a fierce, unbridled force is pressing people down. I know all that and don't like it. It gets my dander up. I don't want to accept things as they are. Life is a serious business, and it's out of shape. It will take all the strength and ability I have to help put it into shape. I also know that I'm no hero—I'm just a strong honest fellow and even so I say: just you wait—we'll win out in the end! And all my powers will go to satisfy my longing to change life—to throw myself down into its very vortex—push it this way and that, mould it, help one thing, hinder another! That's what you call living! That's the joy of life!"

Between these opposite active forces of Bessemenov's household, who are aware of their role in life, there are others who have been excluded from its course. For the time being Pyotr has

no intention of taking up his father's business. Tatyana remains completely oblivious to the hustle and bustle of everyday life around her. Pyotr's mistress, Yelena, lives quite happily on her deceased husband's money. Perchikhin, a vagrant bird-catcher, finds his freedom by keeping aloof from a life where people are willing to scrap over a crust of bread: "I own nothing and trouble nobody. It's as if I was living up in the air instead of down on the earth." Existence outside a system which is hostile to man, acquires the features of a conscious choice in Teterev's case. "What's the sense of living as you do?" Bessemenov chides him. "I find it nobler to drink and go to the dogs than to live and work for the likes of you," he counters.

Like a fairytale knight at a cross-roads, the protagonists of Gorky's play have three ways open to them. They can accept responsibility for preserving the established "lawful way" of life and go on propagating the comfortable living of a Philistine. They may stop playing the game and take up a position of demonstrative non-participation in the functioning of the existing social mechanism. Finally, they may choose to struggle against this society. In Gorky's work this third way is shown to have the best prospects and to be the only one worthy of man. The play's message is to reject the antiquated score of human relations, build life anew and play "something fortissimo" at the decisive moment.

Such is the essence and arrangement of the forces in the conflict which unfolds in the house of the Russian provincial petty bourgeois Bessemenov. However, just as this personal conflict is also of a general nature, reflecting the profound reinterpretation of human values in the revolutionary age, so the significance of Gorky's play itself exceeds the bounds of its immediate content. Numerous links connect it to the past, to the world of Russian classical literature and to the future literature of a new society.

Einstein was once asked what new contribution, in his opinion, he had made to science. The great scientist's reply was to the point: "The new idea that the meaning of Lorentz's transformation exceeds the bounds of Maxwell's equation and concerns the essence of space and time." It is easy to imagine Gorky giving such a laconic reply when asked about his con-

tribution to culture. "What is new in my works," he might have said, "is that the unity between man and the world, which Tolstoy and Chekhov sought, is attained in the revolutionary reconstruction of life. . ."

Not much? Perhaps. However, this represented an entire epoch in the world literary process.

However, only many years later did this result become evident. In the 1890s when Gorky's first works appeared, nobody could predict which would be the most auspicious creative trend. There was only a radiantly optimist mood which inspired people despite all the trials and tribulations of life. And this mood was sensed by the most perceptive artists.

"How I should like to convey to you all the joy, all the signs of spring which come my way in every manifestation of life,"[3] Lev Tolstoy wrote in the early 1890s. And then in March 1895 he wrote, "It's wonderful to be alive at such a time. The water's not only started to warm up but also to boil. And before you know it, it will have flowed into a single seething stream and will have become purified, turning into something different, new and better."[4]

Chekhov also had presentiments of a similar kind which formed the famous lyrical under-current in his works. Passionate longing for the future alleviates their unhappiness and does not let the protagonists of his play *The Three Sisters* abandon hope. "The time is coming, when something huge will overwhelm us. A strong, healthy storm is on its way. It is already quite close and soon it will sweep away the idleness and complacency in our society, the prejudice against work and the stagnant boredom," says Tusenbach. And this is what Colonel Vershinin has to say: "In two or three hundred years life on earth will be more splendid and marvellous than we can imagine. Man has need of such a life and if it does not exist as yet, he should try to foresee it, dream about it and prepare for it. . ."

Gorky, who came from a poor family and was self-educated, brought not only new themes, plots and characters into literature. With particular clarity and force his works reflected "the signs of spring", which Tolstoy had written about, and the signs of "a strong, healthy storm" which Chekhov had felt

and expressed in his plays. Take, for example, Gorky's "Song of the Falcon" and "Song of the Stormy Petrel" which, in fact, became hymns of young revolutionary Russia.

However, even Gorky, who had travelled the length and breadth of the country on foot, still for a while failed to see what these feelings were based on. It was as if they were dissolved in the air and existed without any visible support. Hence, early in his literary career, Gorky introduced conventional romantic forms that were most effective in expressing these moods. Hence, the appearance in otherwise realistic works of optimistic lyrical digressions and monologues which at first seem somewhat out of place and uncharacteristic of the protagonist. Strictly speaking, what sort of person is Tusenbach, who admits himself that he has not done a single day's work in his life? Or, for that matter, Vershinin, the army colonel? Or the drunkard Satin in Gorky's play *The Lower Depths,* who on the very verge of total degradation pronounces wonderful words about man? At this stage the hero and the ideal, the character and the new world outlook have not yet "clicked" together or been artistically woven into a single indissoluble whole.

Gorky had still to make this step forward which was to be of paramount importance for new socialist art. Worth noting are the letters he wrote while working on his first dramatic work. "I want to release a little sunshine onto the stage. Some warm sunshine that's very Russian, and not too bright, but loves everything and embraces everything around. Oh, if only I were to succeed!"[5] wrote Gorky at the end of December 1900 from Nizhny Novgorod to the illustrious theatre director, Konstantin Stanislavsky. And of exceptional interest is this communication, again from Nizhny Novgorod, to his publisher K. Pyatnitsky: "I saw in the new century in the most excellent manner, with a large company of high-spirited, healthy-bodied, cheerful people. They are a real guarantee that the new century will truly be one of spiritual renewal. Faith is a powerful force and they do have faith, both in the firmness of the ideal and in their strength to go resolutely towards it. They are bound to perish on the way, hardly any of them will catch a glimpse of happiness and many of them experience great suffering; true enough many people will perish but the earth will

give birth to even more, and in the end beauty and justice will overcome and man's best aspirations triumph."[6]

Chekhov's and Gorky's plays may be seen as two successive stages in the accomplishment of a complex task: the re-creation of that new quality which emerged in people's consciousness at the turn of the century and entered the world outlook and inner being of the artist. When Gorky was working on his play *The Petty Bourgeois*, he could already imagine those "high-spirited, healthy-bodied, cheerful people" who were prepared to fight for their dream and act according to their faith. And the character, who now became the spokesman of the author's cherished ideas, was not fortuitous. A hero entered the stage, full of historical optimism. He was characterised, in Gorky's estimation, by his quiet confidence "in his strength and in his right to reorganise life and all its ways as he, Nil, saw fit".[7]

However, in *The Petty Bourgeois* the task had still not been fully accomplished. In the play there are no reasons to explain why a "creative man" has appeared in Bessemenov's household. Nil's character has been formed elsewhere, outside his home and immediate milieu. The new hero "butts" into the drama without yet revealing in its concreteness the state of the world which reared him, and his appearance does not have a cardinal effect on the other aspects of the single artistic organism. The drama is incomplete; it fails to become a self-sufficient microcosm. It has much more that is left in the air than is usual in a play and is designed in such a way that the audience is meant to take an active part and compensate for what has been hinted at but not actually said. Nil's monologues, like the dreams of Chekhov's heroes, re-echoed the audiences' mood and at that time did not require a detailed dramatic substantiation or logical explanation. And namely this explains the difficulty of re-enacting such plays in their primary meaning years later before audiences of a different type.

Several more years were needed, including the stormy period of the first Russian revolution, for Gorky (in the novel *Mother*) to be able to re-create the image of a new hero and the area of his activity with the same degree of completeness.

I have very briefly compared the plays of Gorky and Chekhov

but it is just as important to draw a parallel between those of Gorky and Tolstoy.

On October 2, 1910, less than a month before he left his home in Yasnaya Polyana for the last time, Tolstoy noted in his diary, "...Last night I thought very clearly about how good an artistic depiction might be of all the banalities in the life of the rich, of officials, and peasant workers if in each of them at least one spiritually alive person were described." And then again, "After reading Maupassant yesterday I felt an urge to depict the banality of life as I know it and during the night it dawned on me to place a spiritually alive person amidst all this banality. What a good idea that would be!"[8]

Now let us turn to Gorky's creative plans. "Tomorrow I shall start another play," he informed K. Pyatnitsky in October 1901. "It'll be poetic and will have passion and a hero with an *ideal*..." And then a few days later, "You know, I'm going to write a cycle of dramas... One about the intelligentsia's daily round. The whole lot of them without any ideals whatsoever and then all of a sudden among them there'll be one with an ideal! Hatred, wailing and a general rumpus."[9]

The two writers' intentions are amazingly similar. Both sought to get the required emotional effect from the collision of a banal petty bourgeois milieu with a hero embodying an aesthetic ideal. However, let us make a note of the fact that Tolstoy and Gorky describe this hero in different ways. For one he is a "spiritually alive person" and for the other a "hero with an ideal". Is this difference in terminology fortuitous?

First of all, it should be pointed out that the scheme, which came to Tolstoy during a sleepless night in October 1910, the writer had worked on throughout his creative life. Andrei Bolkonsky, Pierre, Anna Karenina, Levin, Nekhlyudov, Protasov and other favourite heroes of Tolstoy are all to a different degree "spiritually alive people" described by the author amidst the banalities of life. As for Gorky, by October 1901 the aim of creating a "hero with an ideal" was no longer entirely new to him for he had already written *The Petty Bourgeois*. In *Summer Folk*, in which with some alterations Gorky later carried out his intention to write a play about the intelligentsia's daily round, the role of Maria Lvovna, "hero with an ideal", is to disturb the complacen-

cy of the other heroes, "the whole lot of them without any ideals". Pavel Vlasov and his comrades-in-arms in the novel *Mother* and Kutuzov in the novel *The Life of Klim Samgin* are true "heroes with an ideal".

Perhaps the distinction between the "spiritually alive person" and "hero with an ideal" lies in the different nature of their activity? What comes first to mind is that Tolstoy's hero is searching for the meaning of life and wishes to get to the root-cause of life's contradictions while Gorky's hero is actually setting about reorganising life. However, this is not always the case. Pierre takes an active part in the Battle of Borodino; Levin is working hard, occupied by cares and concerns. At the same time, Gorky's heroes frequently cause "hatred, wailing and a general rumpus" only because of what they say. There is, obviously, no point in contrasting them directly: one has to penetrate deeper and understand the distinctive features both of the activity itself and of the positive inner qualities of both types of hero.

Tolstoy introduced entirely new, dynamic types, that is, clearly defined, integral and at the same time constantly changing characters. There is no form in which this character could be moulded to solidify for good. His "soul" is a sensitive formation with great vitality for which paralysis is tantamount to death. And this seething compound of moods, thoughts and feelings is by no means a retreat to an ivory tower. Tolstoy's "spiritually alive person" cannot imagine life apart from his people and his inner development is explained by the indefatigable way in which he assimilates and lives through everything that his environment offers him.

A "spiritually alive person" cannot be deceived by any sham feelings or by any pretence at social activity. He is a maximalist both with regards to himself and to the life around him. Steve Oblonsky is right when he says to Levin: "You yourself are purposeful and you would have the whole of life made up of purposeful parts, but this is not the reality." Andrei Bolkonsky wants his public service, which he sees as his vocation in life, to be of great universal value and to help unite people. Pierre demands the truth in everything he meets in the vague, fractured society in peace-time and during the patriotic national war of 1812. Levin wants man to live not only for himself but also for others so

that things of a general and personal significance might be indissolubly fused together.

The Tolstoyan hero's spiritual and practical quests are constantly running up against obstacles which turn out to be completely insurmountable and independent of his will. And when he does appear to have finally found a by-pass, a way of liberating himself morally by joining in the people's life, it is only to realise that this, too, is but an illusion in existing conditions. The hero again has to face the questions which are tormenting him: why he is here in this world, what he should do with his brain, talents and emotions and where his true place in life is.

Fyodor Protasov's actions in Tolstoy's play *The Living Corpse* —his rejection of his family, prodigality and hard drinking—are seen by people around him in different ways. The local society's verdict is that "he is a weak, utterly degraded drunk". Sasha, Protasov's sister-in-law, thinks differently, "He isn't bad, no, on the contrary, he's a wonderful man despite all his weaknesses."

The fact is that it would go against his grain if Protasov tried living like everyone else amidst the "banalities of life". He cannot stand playing the role of a family man and businessman which is imposed on him by society, nor can he stand obeying false conventions, and pretending to be someone he really is not. And he is ready to agree that such a person does not belong anywhere in life. "Don't I see that I'm no good for anything? I'm a burden to everyone else and myself... I'm a misfit..."

Out of curiosity or sympathy, various people come up to Protasov when they meet him in second-rate taverns. And these conversations clearly reflect the incompatibility of the "spiritually alive person" with the existing way of life.

" 'How did you come to ruin your life?'

" 'You see, whatever I do, I always feel that it's not what I ought to be doing and I feel ashamed. Here I am speaking to you now and feeling ashamed. But being a marshal of the nobility and sitting in a bank is even more shameful, so very shameful I can't tell you...'

" 'Why don't you try working?'

" 'I've tried. Nothing came of it and I disliked it all.'

" 'And what about family life?'

" 'I couldn't find satisfaction in the kind of family life I was

leading and so looked elsewhere and got carried away doing so. . .' "

And, most importantly, the common denominator, so to speak, of everything that has been said: "I cannot make myself tell lies."

Protasov is well aware that he had few alternatives when he was still in a position to make a choice. "All of us, you see, in the circle I was born into have three choices, yes, only three: to serve society, making a fortune and adding to the filth we live in. I found this disgusting or perhaps I wasn't any good at it but what's most important, I found it disgusting. Secondly, to wipe out this filth but to do so you have to be a hero which I am not. Or, thirdly, seek oblivion in drinking, carousing and singing. And this is what I have done. Alas, my song's coming to an end."

This way out is hard for Protasov and destructive but the only one which he can accept. It is worthwhile if only for the few minutes in which Masha the gypsy sings his favourite song and "opens the sky" for him. This is real life; this is tidings, so to speak, from another world whose laws are really human.

It is worth noting that the same "three choices" are open to the protagonists of both Gorky's and Tolstoy's dramas: to support life's existing conditions, somehow take up a position of non-participation or fight for the transformation of society. The chorister, Teterev, in *The Petty Bourgeois* in his own way chooses the same fate as Protasov: as we have already mentioned, he finds it nobler to drink himself to death than work for Bessemenov and other Philistines like him. While Nil is ready, in Protasov's words, "to wipe out this filth", he does not consider himself a hero either. Let us recall what he said, "I know that . . . life is a serious business, and it's out of shape. . . I also know I'm no hero—I'm just a strong honest fellow, and even so I say: just you wait—we'll win out in the end!"

How then can one explain that the situation involving "three choices" is solved differently by the two writers? Firstly, by the fact that they interpreted the same reality in two different ways. Gorky was acutely aware of the fact that man could already feel free of the circumstances of life which he detests. A great social storm was drawing near, an upheaval which threatened

to sweep away all the hateful foundations of the old world. And not only rare, outstanding people but also every "strong honest fellow" could now choose an alternative way, which was different to Protasov's, and accept a share of the responsibility for the course of history, shouldering part of the firmament's weight.

The principle guiding Gorky's character depiction becomes directed movement, and not drifting with the current. Gorky's hero finds his way by stubbornly opposing his milieu. One can no longer simply let oneself drift with the tide: one has to intervene in the course of events, and accelerate the movement of life in the particular direction one has chosen.

In the novel *Mother* (1906) Gorky attempted to show how the people had changed in the course of the revolutionary struggle. Nilovna is one of the "people from the dark side of life" who "senselessly and silently work all their life without expecting anything". Nilovna's soul has been "hermetically sealed" but now she gradually becomes aware of herself as a person; she acquires a sense of her own dignity and unexpected new potentials are discovered in her personality.

Gorky expresses an important idea, which is also very dear to Tolstoy, namely that the firmness, strength and long-term prospects of the social liberation movement lie in an indissoluble fusion of matters of a personal and common nature. The psychological motive force behind Nilovna's inner evolution is her maternal heart and not intellectual altruism or abstract ruminations on the advantages of the future system. And this enables her son's cause to become hers, too, and as a result of her evolution she becomes "a hero with an ideal" capable of "feeling sorrow and joy for everyone".

"A resurrected soul can't be killed!" exclaims Nilovna in the book's dramatic final scene. And one cannot help recalling Tolstoy's novel *Resurrection* (1899), which is also about the resurrection of a human soul that has been crushed by life. The situation there is, of course, entirely different and reflects Tolstoy's different conception of life.

Nil, Pavel Vlasov and others of Gorky's heroes are forceful, integral characters who are prepared to fight for their ideals. However, this integrity and loyalty to the ideal is not something

narrowly dogmatic. Such integrity is in fact necessary when the time has come to verify the truths gained through much suffering by the foremost people of the preceding age, and when the opportunity has arisen to achieve the aims which many generations of activists have striven towards. In my opinion, it is namely here that we may find the key to the reason why Gorky and Tolstoy defined their main heroes in different ways. As the new historical age advanced, a reappraisal of the very concept of man's spiritual values took place. A person's restlessness of character, which only a short while ago had been regarded as a positive trait, was now frequently looked upon as a sign of his uncertain social position, his withdrawal from the struggle and failure to keep abreast of the times. At the same time, the integrity of "a hero with an ideal" became the most positive social quality.

Gorky and Chekhov, Gorky and Tolstoy. It would also be interesting to compare Gorky's work with that of one other major early twentieth-century Russian writer—Leonid Andreyev. During the period between the publication of *The Petty Bourgeois* (1901) and Andreyev's play *The Life of a Man* (1907) a warm friendship sprang up between these two writers, only to end in their final rift.

On January 31, 1901, Gorky wrote to Andreyev, "Curse the Philistines, the rulers of life, to blazes, alarm and disconcert them!" And a short while later he again wrote, "The philosophical and ethical base, on which the Philistines' well-being is founded, is disintegrating... Down with the Philistine! For he loves to put boundaries up everywhere!"[10]

In these words one can easily hear an echo of Gorky's thoughts on the content of *The Petty Bourgeois,* which he was working on at the time. And it was namely to reveal the disintegration of the "philosophical and ethical base" of the old system and to show the futility of the Philistines' attempts to keep life within the boundaries they had put up that the writer undertook to write this topical play. However, there was another equally active social aim in his play.

"...A feeling, a wholesome, resilient feeling of human dignity is growing!" wrote Gorky in the same letter. "A new man is arising—a personality ... aware of his right to create a new

life, a brilliant, free life, and this personality is already capable of hating with all his might the lukewarm, satiated, boring and cosy life of the Philistine."[11] There can be little doubt that this character description of the new man directly concerns Nil. And like his hero, who derives the greatest joy from delving into life ("to help one thing, hinder another"), the writer meant with his play to strengthen this growing feeling of human dignity, to intensify people's hatred for the stagnant Philistine way of life and bolster man's confidence in his right to create a new and better life.

Andreyev understood the innovatory significance of Gorky's creative aspirations. "Your writings," he wrote in 1905, "have a very particular, charming flavour, which is noble, powerful, and unique. And, first and foremost, it is a flavour of freedom, of something unrestrained, expansive and bold."[12] "I will tell you something else," Andreyev wrote two years later, "it's unlikely there's anyone else in Russia or in the whole world for that matter whose spirit is as elevated as yours. And if your present works do not succeed and will continue not to do so for a long time to come, it is because of the novelty and genius of your new outlook and perception of the world. There are instances when literature becomes too small. For what is literature after all? Words, devices, paragraphs and chapters, pen and ink. All this is narrow, confined, constricting and unmentionably deceitful. All words, like cheap sausage meat, are stuffed with all sorts of rubbish, and how hard, how impossible it is to build of them something as infinitely and totally new as your soul is now..."[13]

Andreyev realised that his creative essence had always been entirely different. "I'm a man of inner spiritual life, not one of action," he thus defined his first main distinction from Gorky. "You attack life while I defend myself; you're free, I'm a slave..."[14] He had a bitter presentiment of their cordial relations being short-lived, "An iron pot cannot lie next to a clay one in a jolty basket..."[15]

What did Andreyev see as the aim of his creative work? Why did he become less and less satisfied with the store of realism's stylistic devices? "The problem of existence," he wrote, "that's what my thoughts are constantly focused on, and nothing can distract them."[16] He believed in an existence which did not de-

pend on the turning tides in social life. And he searches for the meaning of this existence in his drama *The Life of a Man,* which in his own words, "for me was not literature but myself and my soul".[17] According to Andreyev's design, the echo of life and its condensed tragic essence, and not life in its concrete forms, was to pass before the audience in the scenes "The Birth of Man and the Torments of the Mother", "Love and Poverty", "The Festival of Man", "The Unhappiness of Man" and "The Death of Man". The writer meant it to be neither a traditional allegory nor a satire and attempted a theatrical depiction of Man with a capital "M", with sharp contrasts of light and darkness. "May not only the flesh be showing but also the bones..."[18]

The play's design may possibly have been prompted by one of Gorky's letters. "You see," he wrote to Andreyev in May 1904, "man stands between two bottomless chasms—birth and death..." Man is aware of his fate. But he works and creates although he knows death is inevitable. "Yes, I shall perish, I shall perish without a trace but before this happens I shall build beautiful temples and create great works... This is the true voice of man. And, believe me, a true man, who is really free, always values his human dignity and courageously acknowledges his own finiteness and that of everything about him."[19]

Andreyev chose the profession of architect for his Man, thereby giving him a fair chance of immortality. And he placed his Man between the two bottomless chasms, which Gorky had written to him about: birth and death. However, in his play both "The Birth of Man" and "The Death of Man" turned out to differ greatly from Gorky's life-asserting position. "Someone in grey" proclaimes in a monotonously dispassionate voice from an unlit corner of the stage: "Now all of Man's life with its dark beginning and its dark end will pass before you... A candle lit by an unknown hand will shine forth in the darkness of non-existence—this is the life of Man. And in his blind ignorance, tormented by presentiments and aroused by hopes and fears, he will obediently complete a circle which has been firmly predestined... He came out of darkness and will return to darkness, disappearing without a trace in infinite time, without being thought of, felt or known by anyone..."

Gorky did not accept Andreyev's "cosmic pessimism". He was

critical of the play, saying that Andreyev had "stripped his man too bare by removing him from reality and thereby depriving him of genuine tragedy, of flesh and blood".[20] Gorky's indignation was most sharply aroused by Andreyev's short story "Darkness", which was also published in 1907, and in which the Revolution was depicted as a violent anarchic rebellion. And in 1912 he wrote, "...the man who advocates a passive approach to the world, no matter who he is, is alien to me; because all my life I have asserted the need for an active approach to life and to people. On this I am fanatical."[21] The writers' friendship which they had both cherished, was finally over.

Where, however, did this "cosmic pessimism" of Andreyev's spring from? How may his ever-present feeling of man's doom and lack of freedom be explained? Gorky had no doubts about the answer. He considered that the tragic essence of Andreyev's world outlook and the fact that people's pursuits were for him the vanity of vanities, futility and self-deception were caused "by a Philistine fear of life", a product of the same "philosophical and ethical base" which *The Petty Bourgeois* vigorously attacked.

It is interesting to re-examine Gorky's first dramatic piece from this viewpoint. No matter how strange it might seem at first glance, Bessemenov's children are definitely related in some way to Andreyev's Man.

The vagrant bird-catcher Perchikhin regards Bessemenov's children as virtueless people ("You don't do anything, don't want nothing...") . And this is what their father also finds alarming. "The hardest thing of all," he complains, "is that they've got no backbone, no guts. A person ought to have something that makes him different from others. They don't. They've got no character. Take Nil—he's brazen, he's a scoundrel, but he's got character. He's dangerous, but you can understand him. When I was a young man I loved church music and I loved gathering mushrooms in the forest. Is there anything Pyotr loves?"

However, let us leave Pyotr, who, Teterev considers, still has a chance of being a consolation to his parents and of use to the church and his fatherland. Tatyana's portrait is much more interesting in this respect.

No matter how much Chekhov's three sisters complain about life having stifled them like weeds, they still live in the anticipation of change and never give up hope in a happy outcome, albeit in the distant future. "Time will pass and we shall be gone forever," says Olga at the end of the play. "But our sufferings will turn into joy for those who will live after us... It seems that any minute now we shall find out why we are alive and why we are suffering..." Gorky's Tatyana sees things quite differently. She is totally convinced of the *futility* of life, and this is what shapes her existence.

Unlike Chekhov's Olga, Tatyana is "worn out forever". She is amazed by the fuss others make. "...Everybody's shouting and rushing about ... and I just lie here watching them, unable to see any point to what they—all of them—call living." And nothing can change. "...Life always has been and always will be just as it is now—murky and stifling."

It is namely because life has basically always been the same that Tatyana cannot think or speak about the future and is incapable of imagining that her own life might have taken another course. If there is no difference between yesterday, today and tomorrow, then all other criteria become empty conventionalities, too. "Who is bad and who is good?... Nothing has ever seemed real to me... When I say 'yes' or 'no' it isn't because of conviction..."

There are grounds to say that a particular world perception is revealed through Tatyana's portrait. It is an attitude to the world and to life of a person who has been deprived of his truly human, creative essence, and is doomed, as Andreyev's "Someone in grey" said, to obediently complete in blind ignorance the circle which has been firmly predestined.

"The moving thread of life will take us somewhere but we don't know where," Franz Kafka once wrote. "You are more of a thing, an object than a living creature." "Everything appears to me to be an artificial construction of the mind." "...It's impossible to sleep, impossible to stay awake, impossible to bear life or, rather, the monotonous routine of life."

It is not by chance that I quote Kafka. When I was reading Kafka's *Letter to Father* ("Brief an den Vater"), a most interesting literary and human document, I recalled Gorky's play

by some strange association. A different country, different details of daily life and different characters but there is still something indefinably similar between the home of Bessemenov, the elder of the house-painters' guild, in Gorky's play, and the real-life Prague home of Hermann Kafka, a prosperous shop-owner. This similarity is most likely in the situation: here the influence of bourgeois reality, which is destructive enough as it is, becomes concentrated, and intensified many times over in the microcosm of a Philistine family. Also similar is the bizarre way in which the strength, self-assuredness and business flare of the head of such a household overwhelm and depress the next generation and cause it to feel nothing but disgust and aversion for the family business.

"It seemed to you to be roughly like this," wrote Kafka in his letter in 1919, "all your life you've worked hard and sacrificed everything for your children and for me in particular," and got nothing back except ingratitude, coldness and estrangement. "...I felt pathetic, what's more, not only in your eyes but also in those of the whole world for you were the measure of all things to me." "...I did not feel confident about anything and all the time needed new confirmation of my existence." "Sometimes I imagine a spread-out map of the world and you sprawled across it..."

Isn't this rather like the situation in Bessemenov's house in which the head of the household is always complaining angrily about his children's ingratitude, and doesn't it remind you of Pyotr and Tatyana, and their feeling of estrangement, depression and lack of self-confidence?

I should like to draw your attention to just one basic difference in the treatment of these similar situations. In Gorky's play Tatyana's perception of the world clashes with other attitudes and is, so to speak, only one of the hues in the general emotional palette of the work. On the other hand, in the works of Kafka and Andreyev, there is nothing but this all-absorbing pessimistic world outlook. This seems to me to be the main distinction between realist and decadent art.

Thus, we have examined one of Gorky's many works and its diverse literary ties. I certainly hope that this comparative analysis has been of some use and you will now find it easier to un-

derstand exactly how and why Russian literature made a new step in its development.

Any great revolution begins long before it is actually accomplished. This was true in France at the end of the 18th century, just as it was in Russia at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. A revolution in people's thoughts, emotional attitudes and concepts of their potentialities preceded the political upheaval. All the binding conventions remained the same as before, the only difference being that for many people they lost their oppressive hypnotic effect. In the historical arena "created" man was joined by "creative" man who had realised his role in the transformation of life and was capable of announcing, "I don't want to accept things the way they are!"

Gorky's works, whose innovatory character, as Andreyev so eloquently said, consisted of the "novelty and genius" of his outlook and perception of the world, appeared almost two decades before the revolution. In the years after the revolution this perception of the world became the property of a whole pleiad of writers who along with Gorky became the founders of Soviet literature.

2. THE EPOS BORN OF THE TIMES

Petrograd, October 1917. The flickering reflections of bonfires in the windows of houses where frightened Philistines were waiting for the troubled times to pass, gusts of icy wet wind from the Neva, discordant footsteps of armed detachments along the cobbled streets, despondent, chilled queues by closed bread shops...

Days and nights, which were to become legendary and were to be later re-created and described hour by hour and sometimes minute by minute. At the time, however, their real significance was understood by very few. And one of these few was a ubiquitous American journalist who interviewed the ministers of the Provisional Government and then after the storming of the Winter Palace hurried over there, and eagerly listened to the hoarse speakers at meetings, tore off fences the manifestos of numerous groups and parties and jotted down in his notebook masses of facts and observations, which at the time seemed in-

significant but proved of immense value for future generations. His name was John Reed, and his book *Ten Days that Shook the World* became one of the first literary records of the Revolution.

"For months in Petrograd," wrote Reed, "and all over Russia, every street-corner was a public tribune. In railway trains, street-cars, always the spurting up of impromptu debate, everywhere..." "...We drew out of the station, an immense long train drawn by a weak little locomotive burning wood, and stumbled along slowly, with many stops. The soldiers on the roof kicked with their heels and sang whining peasant songs; and in the corridor, so jammed that it was impossible to pass, violent political debates raged all night long." "Before we reached Moscow almost every car had organised a Committee to secure and distribute food, and these Committees became divided into political factions, who wrangled over fundamental principles..."

The Second All-Russia Congress of Soviets opened and its first decree, The Decree on Peace, was passed. "Suddenly, by common impulse, we found ourselves on our feet, mumbling together into the smooth lifting unison of the *Internationale*... And when it was over, as we stood there in a kind of awkward hush, someone in the back of the room shouted, 'Comrades! Let us remember those who have died for liberty!' So we began to sing the Funeral March..." "A new Russia ... had not come as they expected it would come, nor as the intelligentsia desired it; but it had come—rough, strong, impatient of formulas, contemptuous of sentimentalism; *real*..." A few days later Reed returned to Petrograd from Tsarskoye Selo: "The old workman who drove held the wheel in one hand, while with the other he swept the far-gleaming capital in an exultant gesture, 'Mine!' he cried, his face all alight. 'All mine now! My Petrograd!' "

In the vast Mikhailovsky Riding-School a meeting was in progress of one of the military units of the Petrograd garrison. One after the other, the speakers changed, addressing the audience from the turret of an armoured car. Each passionately argued his case until he grew hoarse. "Never have I seen men trying so hard to understand, to decide. They never moved, stood staring with a sort of terrible intentness at the speaker, their brows wrinkled with the effort of thought, sweat standing out on their fore-

heads; great giants of men with the innocent clear eyes of children and the faces of epic warriors... For the moment they were lifted out of the ordinary run of common thoughts, thinking in terms of Russia, of Socialism, the world, as if it depended on them whether the Revolution were to live or die..." After the speech of Krylenko, the People's Commissar for Military Affairs, who had not had "any sleep for four nights", the vast crowd began, at first hesitantly and then faster and faster, to surge left across the dirt floor, showing they wanted to participate in the Revolution on the Bolsheviks' side. "Imagine this struggle being repeated in every barracks of the city, the district, the whole front, all Russia. Imagine the sleepless Krylenko, watching the regiments, hurrying from place to place, arguing, threatening, entreating. And then imagine the same in all the locals of every labour union, in the factories, the villages, on the battleships of the far-flung Russia; think of the hundreds of thousands of Russian men staring up at speakers all over the country, workmen, peasants, soldiers, sailors, trying so hard to understand and to choose, thinking so intensely—and deciding so unanimously at the end. So was the Russian Revolution..."

"Vast Russia was in a state of solution... Old Russia was no more; human society flowed molten in primal heat, and from the tossing sea of flame was emerging the class struggle, stark and pitiless—and the fragile, slowly-cooling crust of new planets..." "The only reason of Bolshevik success lay in their accomplishing the vast and simple desires of the most profound strata of the people, calling them to the work of tearing down and destroying the old, and afterward, in the smoke of falling ruins, co-operating with them to erect the framework of the new..."

This is how the Revolution in Russia was seen by a partial person who, nevertheless, turned to be an objective witness. And this is an appraisal of the Revolution by a man for whom it was the main cause of his whole life.

According to Lenin, the time of revolution is a time marked by a particular state of social awareness and an exceptional intensity of social emotions. "The whole new era in Russia was won, and is being maintained only by popular passion."[22] "...At moments of great upsurge and exertion of all human capacities,

revolutions are made by the class-consciousness, will, passion, and imagination of tens of millions, spurred on by a most acute struggle of classes."[23]

The creative activity of the working masses is the principal distinctive feature of the new social and economic formation. It is quite obvious, however, that at a time of revolution this activity is manifest with particular force and scope. "At no other time are the mass of the people in a position to come forward so actively as creators of a new social order, as at a time of revolution. At such times the people are capable of performing miracles..."[24] "The thing is that it is just the revolutionary periods which are distinguished by wider, richer, more deliberate, more methodical, more systematic, more courageous and more vivid making of history..."[25]

The people's history-making activity gave rise to Soviets, a type of power resembling that of the Paris Commune. The source of such power was 'not a law, previously discussed and enacted by parliament, but the direct initiative of the people from below, in their local areas—direct 'seizure', to use a current expression". "...Order in the state under such a power is maintained by the armed workers and peasants *themselves,* by the armed people *themselves*..."[26] And it was namely in relying on the initiative of masses that Lenin saw a guarantee of the Revolution's subsequent successes. "We must be guided by experience: we must allow complete freedom to the creative facilities of the masses."[27]

In 1917 John Reed was reporting the news from a country which had not only got rid of serfdom and bourgeois, monarchic, estate, national and all other forms of oppression but had also cast off the fetters of the prosaic state of the world. An age had arrived and become an indisputable fact of history, in which, to quote Hegel again, representatives of the people "themselves become the founders of states so that law and order, codes and customs issue from them and exist as their individual cause...", and when everywhere one feels "the first joy of new discoveries, the freshness of possession..." Man once again began "to feel at home in his surroundings" because he had ceased to retreat "into the background like something of secondary importance in comparison with the complete, independent world", because

the world, which was now dependent on him, began to be present in the individual "as something connected most closely to him and what's more, not in the capacity of the subject's thoughts but as an attribute of his character and feelings..."[28]

All the characteristic features of the heroic state of the world, as defined by Hegel, may without exception be applied to the age of the socialist revolution: the profound and complete unity between man and the world; the individual's spontaneous independence in his social activity; the all-embracing enthusiasm for the accomplishment of great universal goals... The return, as it were, of human society to the starting-point in the individual's formation had come about, of course, not in the literal, absolute sense of the word, but as a return on a new, higher plane in the spiral of history.

What significance might this social and historical phenomenon have for art?

Epic artistic consciousness left the stage of history with the decline of Renaissance art. Since then, over several centuries, art had gradually adapted itself to another type of relationship between man and the world, and to another scale of human possibilities. The great realist literature of the 19th century perfected to the utmost the artistic analysis of the dialectic in the interaction of the character and circumstances, in which external conditions were shown to have an ultimate and decisive influence on man. This literature thoroughly studied the distinctive features of the mediate relations, which prevailed at the time between man and society, and which were effected through the dense stratum of man's immediate environment. Ways of indirectly affirming the aesthetical ideal were discovered and became an important device in art, namely, by contrasting reality as it was with possible reality, and "created" man with the beautiful, free, purposeful "creative" man whose image art had persistently upheld as its ideal.

In our country this powerful tendency in world literature ran up against a different, heroic condition of the world which coincided with the socialist revolution. What's more, this condition was neither fortuitous nor transitory, but loomed like Mount Everest at a time when the world was split into two social systems whose ridges stretched far into the twentieth century.

Hence the obstacles which the young Soviet literature met in its way and successfully overcame. Hence the new qualities which the pioneers of this art introduced to world culture.

At the bottom of Alexander Blok's poem *The Twelve* stands: "January 1918". The wave of revolution had only just reached the corners of the vast Russian Empire, which was no more, and yet immortal verses were already being written in freezing-cold and hungry Petrograd:

Black evening,
White snow.
Wind... wind...
Careful, man, or down you go.
Wind... wind...
Roaring the wide world over!

(Translated by Alex Miller)

A black sky, a snow-blizzard raging over the frozen earth. Only a few people out in the streets. And twelve men of the millions who have joined in the revolution are walking along in a leisurely and confident manner, oblivious of the wind and blizzard. The twelve men have no doubt as to their right to set the "world on fire" and commit to the flames all the wrongs of the old world.

There are no half-tints, only a dazzlingly sharp contrast: "Black evening, white snow..." And in the same blunt manner, without any transition, the past millenium is left behind, rejected without the slightest regret, giving way that very instant to a new unknown future:

Comrade, have courage! keep hold of your rifle!
Let's give Holy Russia a bloody good bellyful!
Stolid old,
Stolid old,
Fat-arsed Russia!

(Translated by Alex Miller)

Johnny, who has killed his sweetheart, Katie, because she was unfaithful is now suffering. But who cares about personal dramas when something else is seething inside? No, Johnny, you've got to pull yourself together!

This is not the time to spend in
Mothering the likes of you!
There's much bigger things impending;
We've got trouble coming, too!

(Translated by Alex Miller)

Bigger things impending... Yes, that was certainly true. The fires of mutiny would blaze everywhere, accompanied by the volleys of foreign dreadnoughts. Destiny would scatter the twelve comrades across various fronts. And who among them would see the day in the distant future when he could put away his rifle and return to his peaceful occupation? Would the dare-devil Johnny stay alive? But now, carrying guns, they strode along the road between two worlds, by a gaping chasm, which had just formed between the past and the future, running right through the rumbling country, tearing families apart and breaking some people's hearts.

...So the Twelve go marching on,
Unsanctified, unblessed...
Grim and ruthless, every man
Ready for the worst...

(Translated by Alex Miller)

The telegraphs and first, small-power radio stations told the world all about the decisive decrees of the new government and of the profound social changes which had begun in Russia. Amidst the storm created by these great events it was not easy to discern and truly appreciate the fact that the first poem revealing the firm tread of the revolution and powerful stride of the working people had been born in Soviet Russia. Also, that this poem heralded the rebirth of poetry, its "debut" in vast areas of social life, and the start of an epic influx of new literature.

The revolutionary age created an unprecedented objective

opportunity for the rebirth of the epos. Very soon a pressing *need* made itself felt for epic forms of literature, which would respond most fully, as many writers realised, to the specific features of the new reality. To illustrate my point, here are some similar views expressed by writers whose creative writing differed greatly.

Dmitry Furmanov: "Epic works on a par with the age are essential."[29]

Yuri Libedinsky: "I dream of writing an epic work which would depict the first three years of the revolution, and whose subject would embrace the entire country."[30]

Boris Pasternak: "I believe that the epos is inspired by the times and that is why in my book *1905* I pass from lyrical reflection to the epic although I find it very difficult."[31]

Alexei Tolstoy: "...The hurricane of the revolution has swept over the country. It has reached the skies and hurled coals across the world. There have been heroic acts. So where are their playwrights? Where are the novelists who would have gathered together millions of wills, passions and deeds in great epics?"[32]

How was this acutely-felt need for the epos satisfied by Soviet literature? It was a difficult task and took time. The rebirth of epic artistic awareness came about in different ways and produced different results. The opportunity to use the epic form in re-creating the new, revolutionary reality was open to everyone, but, of course, the result depended on many factors, such as the specific features of an author's talent, the creative traditions he was guided by, his personal life experience, the nature of his ideological position and character of his world outlook.

The social and aesthetical base of epic artistic awareness, that is, the "heroic state of the world", is a complex phenomenon. The people had been shaken at its roots and lifted out of the rut of its mundane everyday life by a formidable social cataclysm. The "bonds of law and order" had been rent apart and not yet been put back together. Social institutions and human relations were in a state of "primal heat". No longer rigidly confined by circumstances and his immediate surroundings, man found himself face to face with fundamental questions of the universe and was forced to make a choice and act upon it. The flow of life had accelerated and was rumbling like a magni-

ficent waterfall. A great historical task was shaping people's characters and giving a direction, meaning and goal to all this movement.

How would this condition of society be viewed by the writer? What would prove closer to his perception of the world and creative aspirations? Would he be able to embrace the whole vast canvas or would only parts of it be vividly reflected in his works? These questions proved most important for literature which was searching for ways of depicting the age of revolution. The diverse approaches of writers to this most profound sudden change in the people's life depended on how they solved these questions, and the ideological and artistic significance of the results accomplished was determined by them.

The spontaneous nature of the revolution, its great scope, the irrepressible and all-absorbing flood of revolutionary emotions—this is what became the most conspicuous feature of the events. At the same time, the subjective world of many writers made them interpret the essence of the revolution in this particular manner. For some it marked a short stage of their literary biography and for others, it reflected the profound, stable essence of their perception of the world.

Alexander Malyshkin took part in the storm of Perekop, a narrow neck of land in the Crimea beyond which Wrangel's troops were positioned. He was well acquainted with the eminent Soviet general, Mikhail Frunze, who was heading the assault, and he possessed, as his subsequent works showed, a writer's keen observation, and capacity for depicting memorable characters. The fall of the counter-revolutionaries' last Crimean stronghold was transformed by his creative imagination into the epic tale *The Fall of Daïr.*

"The oil lamps were burning far into midnight. Upstairs at the field telegraph the machines never stopped clicking: the tapes kept sliding out with short alarming messages. The one-hundred-thousand-strong army, which had been raised for the attack, stretched out for many miles around..." "The Reds were many; and this great number had to crush the vindictive unyieldingness and cunning of the enemy's last troops."

By countless camp-fires the men chatted about the warm and fantastically rich Crimea. The Army commander came up to

one of the fires. He was recognised and asked something about the Crimea's marvels. "What should he say? He knew that a terribly fierce battle lay ahead that night; in the fiery void a world was being born out of the stinking nomadic camps and ages built on blood..."

The Army commander made a speech before the assault "about the last forces of darkness, about the sunny borders beyond which stretched happiness, wheat and evenings the colour of golden rye. The battalions kept glumly silent; the banners flapped soundlessly under the platform in the luminous yellow glow of the horizon."

The Fall of Daïr, like any integral, talented work, has a particular charm of its own. The writer wished to convey and did in his own way, the inevitable movement of history, the terrible tension before the decisive, final battle between irreconcilable forces, the indissoluble fusion of the masses advancing on the enemy, and their striving towards the wonderful but still misty and indiscernible future. However, this poem in prose is nowadays only read by people interested in the history of literature. It appears that it was wrong to interpret the return to the epic too literally and cast away the mainstays of contemporary literature, such as the principle of the individualisation of characters. The almost symbolic Army commander and two sketchily drawn figures among the faceless masses were not enough to enable the epic tale to stand the test of time.

Dmitry Furmanov's novel *Chapayev* opens with a scene at a railway station. The inhabitants of the town of Ivanovo-Voznesensk are seeing off to the Eastern Front a workers' detachment which Frunze has assembled.

The story is narrated by Fyodor Klichkov, a Red Army commissar. "His eyes ran over the crowd, and there was no end to the black mass—the edge of it was somewhere beyond the gas-lit square. It seemed to him that somewhere beyond the thousands he could see before him, crushed together and disappearing into the thick,pitch-black darkness, there were other thousands, and still others, and so on without end. At this last moment, he suddenly realised with a sharp pang how dear this black crowd was to him, and how hard it was to part with them."

"Mass", "thousands", the "crowd"... Again, a vast number of people is united by a single will and common fate. However, the view of everything that is happening is different from that in *The Fall of Daïr*. For Frunze's men there is no "fiery void", only a "fiery whirlwind" sweeping across the country: "There was no old, and there was no new... And, who had sown this fiery whirlwind?"

Fyodor Klichkov (like, incidentally, the author himself in real life) is appointed a commissar in the division of Vasili Chapayev, a hero of the Civil War. Fyodor's first impression of Chapayev's men is that they are like a band of partisans. "Just try to make out who was in command here, and who subordinate! There wasn't a hint to go by—they all talked in the manner peculiar to themselves; their behaviour was equally rough, their language original, colourful, permeated with sound steppe simplicity."

The night before battle. A strapping curly-haired lad is turning potatoes in a camp-fire. "Probably his head, too, was swarming with persistent thoughts and enchanting, fleeting recollections..." Nearby there was a little peasant man with a red beard, in his late thirties. "The two said not a single word to one another; they were both thinking their own thoughts—in each of them at that moment his own life, bound up with everyone and separate from everyone, was throbbing more sharply and quickly..."

Here we clearly discern the specific feature of the writer's vision and his consistent creative principle, which had polemic sharpness at the time, that is of depicting both the masses and each individual with his own unique features, cares and concerns. True, there are few fully-described individual characters in Furmanov's book for the main task he set himself was to give a complete character portrait of Chapayev.

If these great changes had not taken place in life, Chapayev would have remained just one of the millions of unknown Russian peasants and would have used up his quite average physical energy from morning to nightfall, doing the same things as his father and grandfather had done before him. He was called up to the war and fought, as he told Klichkov himself, bravely and at times with reckless audacity. October 1917 arrived and

the fires of the revolution blazed across the country. It was now that Chapayev's life took an important turn.

Chapayev stood out from his surroundings. "He had absorbed a little culture—he didn't look so primitive..." But he realised himself that he had barely had any education to speak of: "...I only learned to write four years ago, and I'm thirty-five years old! You might say I've lived in ignorance my whole life."

But, to make up for it, he was a bundle of energy. "Chapayev was in his element only during battle. A slight lull in the fighting, and he would begin to languish, become bored, nervous and full of gloomy thought. But to dash from one end of the front to the other—that was what he liked best of all." "With Chapayev, no questions, no matters, were ever left open—with him, everything was always finished. He pronounced his decision, and that was that."

The local population looked upon Chapayev as an authority and complained to him about any injustices. "It was not in Chapayev's nature ever to refuse to interfere in such matters. On the contrary, he got pleasure out of investigating everything himself, unearthing everything, and showing up scoundrels and good-for-nothings."

Chapayev was loud, rough and strict; as gullible as a child, and easily believed rumours of various kinds. He greatly disliked "headquarters" and considered that it was much better acting contrary to their orders for the good of the cause. He hated with all his guts former tsarist army officers. "A stranger might take him for a brute of a man, but when you looked closer, you saw a most artless and affectionate comrade, whose heart was sensitive to every stirring of another's soul..." He could not imagine life without songs: "Another such lover of songs was not to be found; to him songs were as bread, as water.."

A superman? An exceptional person? No, just an ordinary human being. However, "he made excellent use of his good qualities. Born as he was of this raw semi-guerilla peasant mass he could galvanise it to the highest degree, infuse it with the spirit it desired and demanded, and in the centre of everything place himself!"

After his return from the Russo-German front Chapayev had an incredibly short time to live before his final battle, which

ended tragically for him, in the new, Civil War. In fact, it was a matter of months, not years. However, this period not only revealed his heroic nature in the clearest possible way but also marked the formation of his personality, its change and swift spiritual upsurge. In the words of the author, "there were popular leaders of such a kind only in those days—at other times there had been no Chapayevs and there could be none. Chapayev was born of *that* human mass, at *that* moment when it was in *that* state..."

Now let us examine the unusual correlation, which is not without inner contradictions, between the form and content of Furmanov's book.

The novel's content is epic. The author presents a historically unique and inimitable version of the heroic state of the world, which came into being during the Civil War. He re-creates the image of an epic hero born of this state. It was namely such heroes that Hegel described as "integral individuals", who "brilliantly embody everything that has been dispersed in the national character"; "the nation is concentrated, and becomes a live individual in them..."[33] The work takes the form of an analytical narration, part-fictional and part-documentary.

When writing about Furmanov's Chapayev, the researcher hardly needs to add anything. All the essential facts about this hero, including the sociological conclusions as to his origin and his uniqueness have been stated by the author and done so splendidly. However, in many instances the author has merely stated these facts without revealing them in the epic character's inner development. We should not forget, however, that it was the first book of a writer, who dreamed of epic works "on a par with the age", and, what's more, it was one of the first experiments in creating an epic of the revolution by Soviet literature in general.

Alexander Serafimovich's *The Iron Flood* was begun in 1921 and completed and published in 1924, a year later than *Chapayev*. The same very recent history of the Civil War, so vivid in the memory, captured the writer's imagination. And he, too, was preoccupied by the same concern as Furmanov and other Soviet writers: that of finding a form which corresponded with the new contents. "...It somehow had to be captured on a wide

scale." "... It was necessary to draw a panoramic canvas which would give a generalisation, and in separate pictures express something general permeating everything with a single idea which give a meaning to these separate pictures."[34]

It was not an easy task despite the considerable experience of Serafimovich who had joined the literary scene long before the revolution. It was not easy partly because it demanded that the writer cast away all previous experience and start a quest for the unprecedented and new. The relatively small book took Serafimovich three years.

"From all sides came the din of voices, the barking of dogs and neighing of horses, the ring and rattle of metal, the crying of children, the rough swearing of men, calls of women, and the raucous, drunken singing to the accompaniment of an accordion. As though a huge beehive had lost its queen and was humming in frenzied distraction, many-voiced and discordant." Everywhere you looked there was a boundless sea of people—"confusion, dimness, dust, disorder; a tumult and din of voices..."

Thus, from the very start we are presented with an epic, primordial, seething world which has been turned upside down by dramatic, awe-inspiring events. Mountains, sea, black-earth steppes, a fantastically rich country which could make many people happy. Now, however, "...all of Kuban is in flames", "...a beautiful country, smouldering with hatred, contempt, malignity". The rich Kuban Cossacks have risen in arms, sweeping away the insecure islets of Soviet power, and taking out all their deep-seated venom on the newcomers from Russia and the Ukraine whom they regarded as aliens. To escape death, tens of thousands of farm labourers, land-starved peasants, Red Cossacks, Red Army men and sailors from the sunken ships of the Black Sea Fleet, joined together in a motley camp, the like of which had never been seen before. However, there was no escape for they were surrounded on all sides by merciless, hate-ridden enemies.

A practically unsolvable question had to be decided upon: where could they go? And what should they do? People turned to Kozhukh for the answer. "Close to the windmill stood a short, stocky man, with square hard-set jaws. He seemed to be made of lead. His small, grey, gimlet eyes glittered under his low brows as he surveyed the scene, missing nothing."

His father had worked as a labourer for a rich Cossack and he, too, at the age of six had begun working as a shepherd and then as an errand boy in a kulak's local store. At the outbreak of World War I he had been called up to the army and sent to the Turkish front where he became (like Chapayev) a daring machine-gunner of unequaled valour. He was then sent to a military training school. "Uncouth and stone-jawed", and "rustic", he stubbornly mastered the art of reading and writing, and acquired knowledge, all the while remaining an outsider among the officers who despised him. The revolution began and the man went home. "He returned to his native village and found that everything had gone to pieces; what had superseded the habitual in human relations was confused and uncertain."

Kozhukh tells people something they all understand as it is: "Comrades, now we have nowhere to go. Death awaits us, in front of us, behind us. . ."

They cannot stay put because that would mean certain death. Neither can they ditch the string of carts because then their women and children would be killed. So, their only alternative is to get to their comrades across the mountains, and through hostile villages, surrounded by death on all sides. "And the long column began to creep up the mountain like a monstrous snake."

The front of the column stormed the enemy's fortifications and outposts while the rear beat off the attacking Cossack cavalry.

Like a dusty grey snake the column crawled across its home country where brother had risen against brother and neighbour against neighbour. "It was but a few years since they had been small boys, galloping together along the lanes astride sticks, catching crawfish in the sparkling Kuban River, bathing endlessly together. They had sung the delightful Ukrainian songs with the girls. Then they had been mobilised together, and, under a hail of exploding shells, had desperately fought the Turks. And now?. . ." Now Khvomka and Vanka are deadly enemies. Now they hurled the most violent abuse at one another, flung down their rifles, and goading the rest into following them, rushed into a hand-to-hand fight. There are no prisoners and will be none on either side throughout the journey. The only price for everything is death.

Once again a situation arises when, it seems, they have reached the end of the road. The narrow track, hemmed in by the sea and the mountains, leads to a bridge, which is fortified with machine-guns and weapons of various kinds. "All eyes were fixed on him. It was up to him to solve the question on which their lives depended. He had to find a way out of a situation without issue. Had to. Raised above his ordinary powers by the force of those thousands of compelling eyes, Kozhukh said, 'Comrades! We've got no choice. Either we lay down our lives here or suffer torture and death at the hands of the Cossacks who'll catch up with us soon. The odds are too great: we have no cartridges, no shells for our gun, we must fight bare-handed, and we have to face sixteen enemy cannon, no less. But if we are all at one...' He stopped for a second, his stern face set like a rock, and shouted in a savage voice not his own that sent a shuddering thrill through his hearers: 'If we all rush like one man, the road to our own people is open!' "

The breakthrough is a success and the endless column moves on, leaving hurriedly dug common graves behind it. And Kozhukh keeps repeating: "We must go on and on", "...iron discipline and no mercy".

The gods of Greece sent terrible calamities down on offenders. In *King Lear* Shakespeare makes nature participate in the tragedy. The old Russian chroniclers took careful note of omens. Nature also takes an active part in Serafimovich's epic. Day after day, the men on the campaign are scorched by the merciless sun and tormented by hunger and thirst. A violent thunderstorm blows up. It was "a dishevelled, bedraggled, black, naked horde, followed by the merciless heat, bearing with them hunger and despair".

The epic gravitates towards a generalisation and hyperbole. At times an impression is created in *The Iron Flood* of millions and not thousands moving towards light and freedom, and confronted by countless trials on their way. However, at that time wasn't it true that the entire working people had started upon the hardest road in its history? And wasn't Soviet Russia, besieged by enemies on all sides, tackling the most inexorable dilemma of Civil War and didn't problems arise which could only be solved by superhuman efforts?

Kozhukh's army endured unimaginable deprivations and forced its way through all kinds of obstacles. Once again, like at the beginning, his men gathered for a meeting, "...the sea of humans that had surged over the steppe, whereas now it was calm and silent, as if bounded by an iron coast".

Kozhukh made a speech: " 'For whose sake did thousands, tens of thousands of our people suffer that torture? For whose sake?'

"He looked at them again and suddenly said something unexpected, 'For one thing—for the sake of the Soviet power, because it is the power of the peasants and workers. They have nothing beside that...'

"They bandied words, catching fragments from the orators, not knowing how to express themselves but feeling that cut off though they were by immeasurable steppes, impassable mountains, age-old forests, they, too, were creating, if on a smaller scale, a new life of the kind that was being built in Russia, that starved, naked and barefoot, without material means or any assistance, they were creating it here, alone. They did not understand, they did not know how to express it, but they felt it."

Serafimovich's novella is an amazingly integral epic work. Its language, style, system of artistic devices and hero who takes full responsibility for the course of events, in fact, everything in it fulfils the author's creative intention. The novella is permeated with the spirit of the times and the tumult of the "surging human sea"; it not only conveys the movement of the motley masses of peasants along the roads of the Caucasus and the Kuban region but also an idea which gives meaning to human existence.

"I find it hard to say," wrote Serafimovich, "exactly when and why *The Iron Flood* clearly appeared to me precisely in the form of an epic." "When I was describing this flood, I had only a vague idea of the stormy ocean into which these October floods would soon flow." "Strictly speaking, I'm a writer of themes from everyday life. I've always regarded everyday life of paramount importance. The problems I pose arise and are solved in the course of everyday life. However, in *The Iron Flood* for the first time, perhaps, in my many years as a writer, I consciously and intentionally ignored everyday life... I considered it imperative to show the life of the vast collective in *The Iron Flood* 'close-up' and at an accelerated speed for what usually took

a year, took only a month in the revolution... Other measures and other criteria were needed here..."[35]

The Twelve, The Fall of Daïr, Chapayev and *The Iron Flood* show very clearly how and why creating epic works was a complex and innovatory creative process. We may add to this obviously incomplete list a book which truly proved to be "on a par with the age" and is one of the best works of Soviet literature in general: Mikhail Sholokhov's novel *And Quiet Flows the Don.* However, I intend to select from this highly complex novel only one problem, which, of course, I shall also only deal with in brief, that is, the correlation of character and circumstances.

The novel's fourth book. Much water has flowed by in the quiet Don since the lethal whirlwind of Civil War swept through in these parts. Under hillocks, which rise sharply in the steppe, in far-scattered common graves lie many of the book's characters, whose absence is very marked. Grigori Melekhov and Mikhail Koshevoi are sitting at the table and discussing life. Although destiny has made them relatives, it has not diminished their mutual distrust and guarded hostility in the least.

" 'If the Red Army men hadn't planned to kill me that evening, I might not have taken any part in the rising.'

" 'If you hadn't been an officer, no one would have touched you.'

" 'If I hadn't been taken for the army I wouldn't have been an officer... That's making a long story out of it.'

" 'Both a long and a vile, rotten story.'

" 'In any case it can't be gone over again, now it's past and done!' "

Yes, it can't be gone over again, just as it is too late to straighten out Grigori's hard life, full of sharp twists and turns. But it may be looked into again. Why has Grigori's life turned out like this and not in another way? And what is fate anyway? How are the power of circumstances and the will of man linked in it?

Let us recall how it all began. In Tatarsky village life flows in the same measured, leisurely way as it has done for generations. In the Don region the seasons always change smoothly. Life on the farmstead goes on the same as always. A gathering on the village green. The brushwood is chopped. A fight breaks

out by the windmill between Cossacks and some newcomers. Military camps in May. Fishing on the river. The village young people make merry. Haymaking. Harvesting. "From near and distant threshing-floors came the sound of threshing: the shouts of drivers, the whistle of knouts, the rattle of winnowing drums. The village, fat with the harvest, basked in September warmth, stretching along the Don like a beaded snake across a road. In every farmyard with its wattle fence, under every Cossack roof, each brimming bitter sweet life whirled on, separate and apart from the rest."

If the first book of *And Quiet Flows the Don* were the only one, we would regard it as a brilliantly talented but traditional in form, novel about the everyday life of the Cossacks, a special estate of military-trained peasantry initially introduced by the Russian tsars to settle and safeguard the country's remote areas. Such was the writer's intention : to convey the leisurely pace of village life, reveal the special features of the Cossacks' tenor of life where for centuries everything had been closely bound to traditions and customs and tightly fitted together.

At first, the novel's central theme—the love affair between Grigori and Aksinya, a married woman—does not exceed the bounds of either everyday problems or literary traditions. As is to be expected, it gives the old village women something to gossip about. Stepan Astakhov gives his unfaithful wife a terrible beating and enraged Pantelei Prokofyevich announces his decision to marry off his rascal of a son. We are given an opportunity to become acquainted with the traditional rites of matchmaking and a lavish Cossack wedding—the forced wedding of Grigori and Natalya bound to end unhappily.

We have already witnessed a conversation between Grigori and Aksinya, which could have altered the course of events. Worn out by beatings and gibes, Aksinya begs Grigory:

" 'Grisha . . . my dearest . . . beloved . . . let's go away. My darling, we'll throw up everything and go.'

"Grigori listened to her and sniggered.

" '. . .How can I leave the farm? I've got to do my military service next year. . . I'll never stir anywhere away from the land.' "

A model of the centuries-old relations between man and the world may be discerned in these simple words. Grigori is still en-

tirely caught up in a habitual social and natural circle of life which has determined the lives of many generations. Grigori's world is so small it may be covered on horseback. However, it is also firm and stable, it has existed since time immemorial and, it seems, is likely to do so for ever. This world has its own system of values which the average person is not entitled to transgress. Its mainstays are defined by Grigori as being the land, the farm and the Cossacks' military service.

August 1914. Don Cossack troops gallop on lathery horses across the district's fields and villages, shouting, "To arms!" Mobilisation begins for the war.

The beginning of the war is particularly important for Grigori and the thousands of other recruits like him. For the time being, whether they like it or not, they have to blindly carry out other people's orders. However, the range of circumstances, which they come into contact with, becomes extraordinarily wide. Grigori was deeply shaken by his first battle when he, "lashed on by the frenzy of the moment, whirled his sabre above his head", and carved up another man just like himself, an Austrian who had been looking at him with horror. The bloody, senseless chaos of war mutilating people physically and morally, makes one stop and think and shatters the concepts one is used to.

"How're things?" Pyotr asked his brother when they met.

" 'It's like this,' Grigori said hurriedly, and his voice grew strong in its bitterness. 'They've set us fighting one another, worse than a pack of wolves. Hatred everywhere. Sometimes I think to myself if I bit a man he'd get the rabies.' "

These are the words of someone who has begun to ponder over things but is still only a *witness* of events and neither can nor wishes to take responsibility for everything that is happening.

1916. After being wounded Grigori spends some time at home, where he experiences the intoxicating effect of general admiration. "Grigori returned to Tatarsky one man and went back to the front another. His own Cossack traditions, sucked in with his mother's milk and cherished all his life, rose above the greater human truth."

Now he no longer feels simply a witness. He rushes headlong into the war, casting off all doubts and defying the generally growing indignation about the pointless criminal carnage. "Gri-

gori had defended his Cossack honour steadfastly, seizing every opportunity of displaying reckless prowess, risking his life in madcap adventures, changing his clothes and going into the enemy's rear, capturing outposts and feeling that his pain for other men which had oppressed him during the first days of the war had gone for ever. His heart had grown hard and coarse, like a salt-marsh in a drought; as a salt-marsh will not absorb water, so Grigori's heart would not absorb compassion. . ."

Chapayev, Kozhukh and Melekhov were equally daring and brave at the fronts of World War I. But there definitely was a difference. Chapayev's and Kozhukh's bravery at a war, which was repugnant to them, merely testified to their desperate youthfulness and political immaturity. However, Grigori's bravery clearly smacks of social origin. He showed off and "defended his Cossack honour".

In his difficult conversation with Koshevoi, Grigory made out that his promotion to an officer's rank was simply a natural consequence of his call-up to the war. However, this is not entirely true. There were no objective reasons which might have forced him to stand out from his fellows or put his heart and soul into his military service. He chose to do so himself and this was his first independent choice on a social level, a choice, as he vaguely realises himself, which was wrong. Hence his inner feeling of guilt, hence his awareness of the grim price which had to be paid for decorations and ranks.

In 1917 the age-old foundations determining life's usual course, fell to pieces. One after the other, the material, class and other barriers erected to separate people were torn down. Life was no longer in a hard and inflexible "crystalline" state but was now unstable, an unsteady live plasma, drawing man in various directions, and offering him the choice of the most diverse and contradictory circumstances. And literally everyone had to make up his mind at once and define his position in these complex, and totally new conditions.

A soldier, finding himself in the same crater as an Austrian, suddenly decides not to fire and offers him his hand instead. And this is already an act of social choice. Next day the soldier begins thinking about whether to stay on at the front or set off home, come what may. The men in a Cossack patrol who in

the line of their official duty have arrested a group of such deserters, leave it up to their consciences to decide whether to carry out the order or set the fugitives free while the going is good.

What is most important to remember here is that in those days each and every one had to decide which side to join in the severe Civil War which had broken out in the country. The correlation of opposing forces was so vague and the final outcome of the strife so uncertain that each person felt his choice would play by no means an insignificant role in deciding the fate of the country or, for that matter, of mankind in general. Indeed, his choice might well prove the last grain which would tip the scales of history.

For many of Sholokhov's heroes this choice is predetermined by their class affiliation, by their deep-rooted convictions and all their past life.

Captain Listnitsky, a landowner, and cornet Bunchuk, a worker by trade, made up their minds long ago as far as this is concerned; Misha Koshevoi and Mitka Korshunov, who come from different property-owning strata of the Cossacks, naturally find themselves in opposite camps. It is only now, however, that many of the others begin working out what's what and thinking about their place in the seething strife all around them. " 'I'm all muddled,' Martin Shamil complained. 'Hell knows which of them's in the wrong... A fine mess!' "

Grigori Melekhov is not only a middle peasant, who has to work for a living and is at the same time a property owner; he is also a Cossack with a typical Cossack mentality. Life has put him in a difficult, contradictory position which might well lead to a tragic outcome. In the book he is described as being "halfway between two poles". And in as far as these two poles often attract and repel him with equal force, just a slight jolt is sometimes enough to make him turn sharply away from the path he appears to have chosen.

As the author comments on this score: "About this time his opinions underwent a considerable change, as the result of the events occurring around him and the influence of one of the officers in the regiment, Lieutenant Yefim Izvarin." A most important role is, of course, played by the stormy events in the country, which continue day after day, constantly changing the

situation. However, for someone torn by contradictions and going through torments, "struggling painfully to see daylight through the jumble of thoughts oppressing him, to come to some decision", meeting convinced people with a firm stand proves of no small importance.

Only a few months have passed since the revolution but Grigori has already been in both camps. He now feels he has reached a dead-end and is desperately tired. "He wanted to turn his back upon the whole hate-riddled and incomprehensible world. Behind him everything was entangled, contradictory. The right path was difficult to trace; the ground quaked under his feet as in a bog, the path branched in many directions and he felt no confidence that he had chosen the right one. He had been drawn towards the Bolsheviks, and had led others after him, then had hesitated, and his heart had cooled... He longed to clean the cattle-yard, to toss the hay, to smell the dung. He wanted peace and quietness."

No, he cannot be likened to a chip of wood bobbing aimlessly on the waves. The tragedy of the situation lies in the fact that a person with an integral, strong character, capable of standing up for himself and taking responsibility for all his decisions and actions, is wavering and desperately searching for the right course to follow. This introspection, this state of being divided in two and being given to grave doubts is not typical of Grigori's character and causes him to feel "a deep, never silenced exasperation". And whenever he makes a move in a definite direction, no matter how briefly or erroneously, he is transformed.

These moments of self-discovery are fleeting, few and far between. Grigori's fate is such that he is mostly in a spiritual quandary. "During those days, in an attempt to rid himself of his sombre thoughts, thoughts of the events going on around him and his prominent part in them, Grigori took to drinking." And at this time he and his wife simply could not find a common language.

" 'Huh! Ashamed;' Grigori bared his teeth in a smile and added: 'I've forgotten how to be ashamed. How can you feel shame when all your life's messed up? There you are killing people. You don't know what all the mess is about...' His face darkened and the words came with difficulty. 'It's hard, and you'd do anything to forget it: vodka or women. Wait! Let me finish. There is some-

thing eating away at me all the time. Life's taken a false turn, and maybe I'm at fault in that too...' "

Much water has flowed under the bridge since the initial conversation he had with his brother, Pyotr, in which he spoke of the events in an uninvolved manner: "They've set us fighting one another..." He has taken a prominent part in the events which have occurred since then in the Don region. And things have gone wrong in many ways, and failed to take account of the people's true interests. And that is "eating away" at Grigori, a person who is conscious of his involvement in the course of life, that drains his resources, and not just the war and the prolific bloodshed.

Sholokhov stretches his hero to breaking-point, until his hair is completely grey, and his heart chilled by indifference and until he sees a black sun rising over the dark wind-swept steppes. The writer finds the most terrible punishment for his hero: a life which has lost its meaning and become black "like the charred steppes". However, he also gave the world an amazing riddle which has occupied literary thought for many decades now: despite all the tragic zigzags of his hero's ruined life, he gives Grigori Melekhov obvious human charm.

The force of Sholokhov's novel lies in the fact that he reveals the age of the revolution in all its many facets and in its contradictory complexity. The revolution is a victory for the oppressed and exploited but it also gives rise to "long birth pangs" (Marx) or, as the author puts it in *And Quiet Flows the Don,* "the pains of a great redivision". These are not abstract pains: they are reflected in the searchings, mistakes and sufferings of people who have been caught up in the vortex of events. One may find fault with such people (as they do with themselves) but one cannot help but feel compassion for their pain and suffering.

Grigori Melekhov became spiritually bankrupt and ruined his life by failing to find the right way, and trying to protect the past from the future. And this is all the more tragic because there is something in him that belongs to this future. He is organically bound up with nature and peasant labour which the long war tore him away from and which all these years he never ceased to long for. He has human dignity. He aspires towards independence and freedom and upholds them to the last. So

forceful is his character that he is capable of enduring the most painful blows of fate (the hero of Sholokhov's later work, *The Fate of a Man,* has an equally forceful character). He has a capacity for spiritual searching, and for critically appraising his responsibility for the course of life...

I shall end this discussion of *And Quiet Flows the Don* with excerpts from three interviews published in a Soviet literary journal.

Jean Laffitte, France: "It is a work as sweeping as history itself. A grandiose social renewal occurring against a background of the grandiose Russian revolution."

Meša Selimovič, Yugoslavia: "*And Quiet Flows the Don* is not simply a continuation of the epic tradition. It marks its crucial renewal and introduces a new type of narration which has had a tremendous influence on 20th-century world literature."

Judah Waten, Australia: "Sholokhov's work affirms the triumph of the human spirit and man's ability to change his position."

In his book *Revolution and Literature* Soviet literary critic Yuri Andreyev examines hundreds of novels and stories written in the 20s and 30s about the October Revolution and the Civil War. I have only touched upon five works, and, what's more, have not even mentioned the most interesting poetry and varied drama of the period. However, it is certainly not my intention to compete with specialised pieces of research in the scope of material discussed.

When in 1917 a direct armed fight finally broke out between the popular "lower classes" and authorities of the "upper classes", the one-time unity of Russian democratic literature vanished into thin air. At this crucial moment in history a considerable number of writers made a step to the right and joined the enemies of the revolution. In his poem *The Twelve* Blok devoted the following remarkable verses to this social phenomenon:

But who might this be? Long, lank hair,
And muttering at the vacant air:
"Traitors! Traitors!
Woe to Russia!"

Must be a writer or a
Soap-box orator...

(Translated by Alex Miller)

Balmont, who had been "left-wing" in 1905 and had even published a social-democratic newspaper, now wrote the novel *Under the New Sickle* in emigration. Ardent social sentiments dictated to him the words which were uttered by one of his heroes: " 'Every revolution is blood and filth. Every revolution is a volcanic eruption of fury, and the fire of this eruption is destruction, and its smoke triumphant ignorance and unbridled baseness... Towns have been turned into madhouses and villages into dens of thieves...' "

A Dozen Stabs in the Revolution's Back was what Averchenko entitled his collection of novellas. Militant anti-democratism and hatred of the "mob" permeated the works of Bunin, Nazhivin and many other émigré writers.

However, why only mention the past? The 1917 Revolution arouses the same wide range of emotions now, sixty-odd years later. Alexander Solzhenitsin, now a recluse in the American State of Vermont, time and time again has severely criticised the West for having underestimated the dangers of Communism from the very start, missed the chance of winning a victory in 1918-1920 and joined the wrong side in 1941.

Completely different social sentiments were expressed by the literature written in Soviet Russia. Both the representatives of the old artistic intelligentsia (such as Blok, Serafimovich and later Alexei Tolstoy) and the writers born of the revolution, regarded everything that happened as the dream of the working people come true, as their emergence into the world of human dignity and culture.

Neverov's heroes wish to find happiness for themselves and for others. His dream of fine, harmonious people is always with Levinson, the commander of a partisan detachment in Fadeyev's novella *The Rout*. At the most testing times not only is the old destroyed but a new, just life is created by the heroes of Boris Lavrenev, Vsevolod Ivanov, Lydia Seifullina and other Soviet writers.

The history of literature has confirmed that it was those artists who regarded the socialist revolution as a powerful action on the part of the people itself, who succeeded in reaching new heights in their creative work and in giving the world the most perfect examples of contemporary epic art, the like of which had not been seen in the whole of the 20th century.

3. MAN CAN DO ALL

The state of "primal heat" is characteristic not only of the first years after the revolution, when the new socialist world disputed in arms its right to exist. At the turn of the 20s and 30s many millions of people in the countryside were stirred into action and began creating a new collective way of life. "Everything there has again been turned upside down like it was in 1918," comments one of the heroes of Malyshkin's novel *People from the Back of Beyond*. It was at this time, too, that the country set to work on the construction sites of the first five-year plan.

"Reconstruction is in progress, the like of which has not been seen since time immemorial," wrote Leonov to Gorky on October 21, 1930. "There's an ear-splitting din all around... No way back for us now..."[37] Gorky, for his part, declared in one of his articles published in 1933: "In our day and age man is influenced by seething reality in the most varied ways..."[38]

Their visits to construction sites of the first five-year plan for many writers marked a decisive moment in their literary careers.

In his "Autobiographical Notes" Nikolai Pogodin wrote that he became a playwright after visiting the Stalingrad tractor factory: "The implementation of the first five-year plan completely astounded us with its socialist innovatory quality, and the daring metamorphosis of the national dream into totally new living forms. What I saw was truly fantastic. The pace of the vast construction had a striking effect on people and radically changed them, and I instinctively perceived the essence of a significant process, not very clear to me at the time,

which was full of dynamic contradictions and instilled with an inner dialectic that is precisely what constitutes drama."[39]

Valentin Katayev's acknowledgement is equally worth noting:

"...The time of the five-year plans opened up the widest horizons for me and showed me my place as a writer and my concrete task.

"Also, I became aware of my vast responsibility to my Party and class.

"For almost one and a half years I worked with rare enthusiasm on the chronicle *Onwards, Time!* This work marked a turning-point for me in many ways..."[40]

Many other writers said the same of themselves.

Here is a short chronicle of the literary life of the time:

1930: Leonov's *The River,* Pogodin's *Tempo* and *Poem about an Axe,* Ilyin's *Story about a Great Plan,* Medynsky's *Samstroi,* Lugovskoi's anthology *To the Bolsheviks of the Desert and Spring,* Bezymensky's *Verses Make Steel.*

1931: Shaginyan's *The Hydro-Electric Main,* Pavlenko's *Desert,* Ilyenkov's *The Driving Axis.*

1932: Gladkov's *Energy,* Pogodin's *My Friend,* Katayev's *Onwards, Time!,* Paustovsky's *The Gulf of Kara-Bugaz* and Kirsanov's poem *The Five-Year Plan.*

1933: Gorbatov's *My Generation,* Yasensky's *Man Changes His Skin,* Ilyin's *The Great Conveyor.*

1934: Paustovsky's *Kolkhida,* Ehrenburg's *The Second Day,* Nikolai Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered,* Dovzhenko's *Aerograd,* Pogodin's *Aristocrats* and Smelyakov's anthology *Happiness.*

In the books about socialist construction we are also presented with a picture of "upside down", seething, rapidly altering reality and of great numbers of people searching for their part in it all, characters dealing with unusual, changing circumstances.

Here is an excerpt from Ilya Ehrenburg's novel *The Second Day:*

"All over the country the steam engines were overstraining themselves. An agonising whistle came from their insides: they simply could not keep up with the people. During the night sacks,

baskets and bundles magically grew into mountains on railway platforms... Sedate life had ended. People were rushing off and nothing could stop them any more..."

"All Russia has torn up its roots and set off," repeat the heroes of Alexander Malyshkin's novel *People from the Back of Beyond,* as they look at the crowds elbowing their way into long-distance trains at stations. "All sorts of people were going: the old and young, whole families and homeless folk. Something had taken hold of them and lifted them out of their time-hallowed places, the lands of their fathers. But where were they going to, these ever-hopeful searchers, these multitudes of silent anonymous people? The railway carriages were enveloped by misty visions of construction sites, of fortunes one could make in towns, and of hopes the unknown future held. Behind lay Moscow all ablaze. This was not an illusion created by the steam engine: sparks were flying from the city and swirling invitingly over the villages and outlying districts... Tomorrow gleamed through the dark window."

The following excerpt from Leonov's novel *The River* reads like a sequence to this picture: "The train would pull in at dawn. They would clamber out of their compartments, grey in the dim morning light, all with an identical look—their caps stuck up on end and beards rumpled with sleep..."

Motley crowds would arrive at their destinations, and somehow get themselves and their meagre belongings installed in the overcrowded wooden barracks and mud huts. Hoarse team leaders and superintendents would welcome the reinforcements and show them to their work places. Without managing to have a good look round, the newcomers would set to with spades, crow-bars, axes, wheelbarrows and start working in tune with the countless masses of people who from morning till late at night and sometimes round the clock dug foundation pits and canals, cemented the foundations of future open-hearth furnaces and kilns, made dams and rooted up taiga forests.

Thus were built the Magnitogorsk and Kuznetsk metallurgical works, the Stalingrad tractor factory and Balakhna pulp-and-paper mill, the hydro-electric station on the River Dzoraget in Armenia, the irrigation canal in Tadjikistan and drainage canal in West Georgia, and also the new town on the banks of

the Amur, in fact, all the construction sites of the first five-year plans, which were recorded not only in the history of the Soviet economy but also in that of Soviet literature.

"Russia has begun to build," wrote Alexei Tolstoy in an essay on the Volkhov construction project. "Words have become flesh. All the storms, sufferings, enthusiasms, anger and calamities of the past years ... have been converted into the first lights of the Construction."[41] One cannot possibly understand the literature of that time if one ignores a small detail here: the writer spells the word "construction" with a capital C. We are dealing with books not simply about the building of factories and hydro-electric stations but about the Construction which began after the great social Revolution, about the Construction which was seen by its participants as a process whereby the ideals of the new system were translated into reality and also as the most profound transformation of man and the world.

Yesterday's commissars, who had passed the ordeal by fire, became the directors of enterprises and heads of building sites. Each construction project was a beacon of socialism in what was still old peasant Russia, a melting-pot in which new people, new habits and convictions were shaped. The obstacles and deadlines were impossible but the work had to be done, come what may, or else the new socialist world would not be able to stand up to the enemy surrounding it on all sides.

Literature had already conveyed the "local colour" of a given time. Now Alexander Malyshkin in his novel *People from the Back of Beyond* attempted to capture the unique smell of the times. The short respite after the Civil War drew to a close and "the years now had the smell of cement, lime and iron; the jagged outlines of building towers loomed on the horizon. The vast five-year plan penetrated all the nooks and crannies of life and its ends projected into a dream. . ."

The powerful smell of militant, fiery reality pervaded everything. The newspapers wrote about workers' brigades, the challenge to emulation and various new undertakings of factory collectives. At night glowing reflections ran along the quiet Moscow side-streets: it was the workers of the automobile works, lighting up their way home with torches. "A lively procession

of men in plain and simple coats and caps and women in kerchiefs moved across the city. . ."

"Silent, anonymous people" who all looked alike travelled from far and wide to the famous and little-known construction sites. However, this was a time when the anonymous acquired a name and a new personality was born in collective labour.

One of those to acquire a name was a coffin-maker by the name of Ivan Zhurkin, the main character of *People from the Back of Beyond*. The only recollection he has of his past is that of the revolting aftertaste of "the doleful, shallow, cheerless" existence of a craftsman working by himself. His only consolation in this life is a coffin of unique quality that he has made. "He worked on it by fits and starts at odd moments he had to himself after the tedious rough carpentry work; and the ill-fated craftsman who was pining away all on his own, would rejoice over it and sometimes even shed tears."

The time, however, had come when the hidden talents of the Zhurkins of this world. which had been suppressed by force of circumstances, were put to another use. Another of Malyshkin's heroes, Podoprigora, a former artilleryman, "felt that a great pressure, like the pressure limit of gases in a gun barrel before an explosion had built up over the past years". Millions of hands had long been waiting for this hour and yearning for this work. And, as far as Podoprigora is concerned, the whole point of his work at the construction site is to show Zhurkin and others like him the lofty social meaning of their labour and turn yesterday's peasants and craftsmen, whose dire straits have brought them there, into conscious construction workers. "The socially conscious ones are those who clearly see the direction and goal they're heading towards."

With childlike timidity Ivan Zhurkin crosses the threshold of the saw-mill and picks up the carpenter's tools as if he had never done so before. A man who has already lived a long life, learns to walk, see, feel and work as an equal member of a workers' collective and as a participant in a great cause enhanced by lofty ideals. He is caught up by the fervent pace of the construction site and catches the "heroic, ambitious excitement" passed on from one man to the next in the collective of builders. "What joy! The coffin-maker had almost forgotten

its taste... Nothing in the world could now tear him away from the joiner's bench."

National property becomes no less precious to Zhurkin than his own. In order to protect this property, he overcame his usual shyness and suggested at a meeting that they set up a voluntary fire brigade in the shop. And when he himself is entrusted with the organisation of such a brigade, Zhurkin reveals himself even more clearly as a man "born anew by the revolution" (Gorky), as a conscious builder who is beginning to understand the meaning of his work.

Valentin Katayev called his novel *Onwards, Time!* a "chronicle". He chose the same material as Malyshkin: the construction of the Magnitogorsk Metallurgical Works ("Magnitka") but set himself the creative task of conveying through one episode the atmosphere of the time and the swift pace of life.

A record has been set in Kharkov: a team of concrete-workers has made 306 batches of concrete in one shift. News of this spreads instantly to Magnitka. When section manager Margulies picks up the telephone receiver in the morning, he discovers that the telephone operator is already in the know. At midday he drops by at the canteen. "The saleswoman took off her spectacles and tapped the newspaper with them. 'Comrade Margulies, Kharkov beat us, eh? What will you say to that?' " Everyone does some quick mental arithmetic to work out how many batches have to be made per minute and hour to beat the Kharkov team. Nobody doubts that this will eventually be done. "But which shift is going to beat the record? And when? That's the whole point."

Margulies' choice falls on the team headed by Ishchenko, capable of breaking the record.

Like most of the builders, Ishchenko comes from a village. He used to tend cattle and earn his living the best way he could. He joined a collective farm and then went to work in the Urals. "You're got to live, you've got to make money, you've got to feather your nest... So off he went. He arrived. Time was speeding by. Life was gradually changing... He came as a seasonal worker, a navvy, bent on earning a packet. He felt miserable the first few days. It looked like the same steppe and the same stars, but no, these steppes and stars were strang-

ers to him. And he had to do an enormous lot of work besides. Somehow he got a little more used to it and began to see what was what. Then he was made a team leader." And soon Ishchenko forgot everything in his feverish work at the site, even his girl whom he had left at home. "He had come with one thing in mind and found something different."

There were fourteen men in Ishchenko's team and they were all different. The men who had worked for six months at the site were called old hands. It was they "who now recalled, like some legendary campaign, the past winter, the bitterly cold Urals winter in the steppe with its blizzards and snowstorms and round-the-clock shifts; it was they who, like soldiers, recalled their battles and took a pride in their frost-bitten fingers as if they were wounds. After every shift they would go back to their barracks as if from an assault and they regarded the construction site as a front, the team as a platoon, Ishchenko as their commander, the barracks as their reserve, the foundation pit as a trench, and the cement mixer as a howitzer." All or almost all the men in the team were comrades and brothers on an equal footing. "Time sped by them and they gradually changed like volunteers on a campaign... The new recruits became soldiers, the soldiers heroes and the heroes leaders."

There is no need to describe the team's record-breaking shift in detail. Suffice it to say that the team had only one piece of machinery—the concrete mixer. All the rest of the work was done by hand with spades, wheelbarrows and the most elementary tools for making concrete. The sharp increase in labour productivity was achieved thanks to the enthusiasm, strength and determination of all the men. And also thanks to their faith in the fact that this work was needed by the people and that it would help, if only a little, to make the great social goals, which inspired the builders, become a reality more quickly.

Ishchenko's team makes a total of 429 batches in eight hours of truly heroic work. The world record is broken. Khanumov, who has not been allowed to try and beat this figure, is beside himself. Margulies, who has not eaten or slept for twenty-four hours, drops off to sleep in public.

As he dozes off, he catches sight of a newspaper with a report on yet another record set by concrete-workers. He asks:

" 'Well . . . where now?'

" 'At the Chelyabinsk tractor factory,' shouts Vinkich.

" 'How many?'

" '504. . .' "

Where there's a will, there's a way: the most intense battle for socialism goes on.

Ilya Ehrenburg called his novel about the construction of the Kuznetsk metallurgical works *The Second Day*. "It is like the creation of the world," says one of his novel's heroes for him. The first day of creation was the October Revolution. The second saw the socialist construction, reaching great scope and intensity, a great school moulding people of a new kind.

Two hundred and twenty thousand builders of the works and other projects of the town "lived as if they were at war, exploding rocks, cutting down forests and standing waist-deep in icy water, reinforcing the dam. Each morning the local newspaper reported on the victories and set-backs, setting in motion of a blast furnace, new ore deposits, an underground tunnel and the power of a new crane. . . People hurriedly laid the fire-bricks. A day never passed without them setting new records, and when they got frost-bitten they lay quietly in hospitals without a word of complaint".

Ehrenburg gives a sober analysis of the social and psychological motives of the crack workers. "Some of them overstrained themselves in order to get sweets with their tea or a length of trousers' material. And others were driven by ambition: they did not want to be left behind. There were those who worked with as much excitement as people playing cards. And there were men who dreamed of getting on in the world, of becoming a chief foreman, going to training courses in Sverdlovsk, and exchanging their pickaxe or sledge hammer for a manager's briefcase. Also there were those who idolised the factory and looked upon the machines as human beings. They nicknamed the blast furnace 'Ivanovna' and the open-hearth furnace 'Uncle Martin'. There were men who believed that as soon as they had finished building the factory, life would become easier at once: there would be rails and along them would run trains carrying

sugar, tea, fabrics and boots. There were many crack workers. They were a mixed bunch but they all overstrained themselves and worked faster than seemed humanly possible."

The fact is, however, that all these different types of workers were highly susceptible to change, that is, over the months the same people could belong to any of these categories. When a person came to the construction site, his standards gradually changed and he, impelled first by strictly personal, narrow motives, attained an increasingly loftier vision of his mission. In the novel such an evolution is traced in most detail in the character of Kolka Rzhanov.

After his mother's death nineteen-year-old Kolka set off for the Kuznetsk construction site. He ended up in Tikhonov's team, which was always lagging behind. He could not stand being called a "slow coach" and so began persuading his comrades to try harder. "And thus a battle began. Kolka did not actually think about the gigantic works, the country, or the revolution; his main concern was beating the records." Tikhonov fell ill, Rzhanov was chosen team leader and his team soon took the lead.

Kolka borrowed a book on cranes from one of his comrades and read it from cover to cover. Then "he began to look carefully at the other machines and grew very curious about them". He started studying chemistry and then electricity. "He realised how little he knew and wanted to find out about everything at once. It was a sharp, agonising feeling like hunger." Outwardly nothing seemed to have changed. The strenuous work at the building site and his cares and concerns as a team leader were the same as ever. However, he now set aside only four or five hours for sleep. "He saw his comrades sitting like him in the corners of the barracks with tattered, well-thumbed books. The others were in the grip of the same fever. It wasn't a rare disease: it was an epidemic."

Rzhanov says to a friend:

" 'In the office I saw a poster showing Kuznetsk three years ago and Kuznetsk today. It's amazing! It was just a bare field to start with. And then all these blast furnaces, batteries and open-hearth furnaces appeared. Just imagine drawing a similar poster of Kolka Rzhanov three years ago and Kolka

today. You know, I didn't understand a thing then. But I thought I knew everything. And life seemed such a bore to me then but now I have a completely different view of it. . .' "

In Leonov's novel *The River* we see a boundless forest where a pulp-and-paper mill is going to be built. "It was cold, alone with that wasteland and the primeval sky that hung over it", "fair cracks your eye, it does. . ." "This is all timber, scads of timber . . . standing, rotting, withering. It's a breeding ground for mushrooms, bears, hermits, goblins, what you will . . . except good sense and firm direction."

The forest in *The River* is not at all like the kind, life-giving benefactor in Leonov's post-war novel *The Russian Forest*. And it is not simply timber which may be made into sleepers, beams, pulp and paper: it is a symbol of stagnant, patriarchal Old Russia which, in point of fact, had not yet been affected by the socialist system. It is "an impenetrable human forest" where reason and prejudices, countless talents and primitive instincts are lurking.

Uvadiev, the manager of the construction site, and the other protagonists of *The River* are faced with the most complex and truly epic tasks. It is not enough to overcome all the natural difficulties awaiting the builders in the dense forest away from civilisation: they also have to "conquer Russia" in its ancient patriarchal state. It is not enough to erect the buildings of the works and fit them out with modern equipment: they also have to dispel "the ancient gloom" pervading everywhere. The people in charge of the construction site are equally concerned about the "squandering of the vast potential of woodland and local people, neither of which was integrated into the country's economic cycle", or involved in the rapid movement of new reality.

Uvadiev, "a pillar of the revolution" and rigorous "architect of the common weal" is the right person to tackle these problems. The most important feature of his character and conduct is seen in the concentration of his every effort to solving the problems facing him. "Everything, except the paper-mill project took on the most simplistic forms in his mind, and even love was to him nothing more than nourishment that would

build up his strength so he could face the morrow's road." "...He cared for nothing that crumbled under the crude planning tool of his reason."

That is how the author characterises Uvadiev. And this is what the hero has to say himself:

"...Aye, maybe we are in a hurry to replace the older generation with one that's not contaminated with the past,... but in our day and age you've got to think big—dozens of factories, thousands of acres, millions of people... There's no place for nit-picking in our creative thought!"

"Too many love to whimper about the past because they haven't got guts enough to face the future. But listen to the figures, not to the moaning and groaning!"

Spring... "A hodgepodge of emotions and a spiritual muddle."

The soul? "There's another weird word. Y'see, I know cotton, bread, paper, soap ... but I don't know what the soul is. What's it made of? Where do they sell it?"

The truth? "It is what I believe right now!"

One should not take everything he says too literally. One should, however, note how necessary and even essential it was for the person in charge of a major construction site of that time to be strict, firm, shrewd and ascetic. One should also bear in mind the artistic nature of the epic hero aspiring towards one particular goal. The criteria of the ordinary social and psychological novel simply do not fit Uvadiev.

At the end of the novel Uvadiev sits silently on a hillock overlooking the construction site. It is snowing and the lights of the Sot Construction Site are shining. "Probing the March gloom with barbed, dispassionate gaze, he beheld, perhaps, the towns that were to rise from those insanely vast expanses, felt the flower-heavy breeze that blew through them tousling the locks of a little girl with a face he knew... Nothing was plainer to see than that the countenance of the Sot was altering and that the change also has been wrought in the people she bore."

The literature of the 30s was well aware of the complex and dramatic nature of the change that was taking place in man during the social transformation of the world and of the vast historical significance of this process. Bruno Yasensky aptly ex-

pressed its essence in the title of his novel—*Man Changes His Skin.*

"We, a generation who has done away with capitalism in order to form a socialist society, are in the process of changing our skin," says engineer Polozova to Clark, an American who had come to work on the project. "This is a painful process which involves millions. A change has come about in the relations between people themselves, also between people and things, and between people and the State. The scale of each individual personality has increased and the old skin of capitalist relations has burst. We are changing it for a more capacious one in which we shall find it easier to breathe." And then again: "It's a long and hard process. The old skin clings so tightly that sometimes one has to tear it off together with the flesh. . ."

Speaking of the period of the first five-year plan, Nikolai Pogodin noted that "it was a time of great scope and activity". That is why there are so many characters in his plays about the 30s.

The fictional works about Soviet building projects also contained many characters. These were not traditional novels narrating the most minute psychological nuances of people's relations in a narrow family circle or confined sphere of everyday life. By various means, including the depiction of a great many characters, these writers attempted to convey the unique features of the time: the altered nature of all relations and bonds, the swift movement of life and the massive scale on which people were being remade in the course of socialist construction.

However, as the proverb goes, no gain without pain. The novels about the building projects of the first five-year plan do not contain detailed analyses of the inward dialectics of the hero who has learned to understand the universal and historical significance of his activity. As a rule, we are only given a brief outline of the main landmarks in the hero's spiritual development. The complex processes involved in the "shedding of skin" are sometimes revealed in a few matter-of-fact statements as if they are universally comprehensible and thus do not require explanation. "So off he went. He arrived. . . Some-

how he got a little more used to it... Then he was made a team leader."

Man can do all. It appeared that this long-since forgotten device, this principle of life and symbol of faith of the Renaissance, again became the main feature of social consciousness at the time of the new socialist renaissance of mankind.

"During these years extraordinary things were happening before our eyes," we read in Boris Gorbatov's novel *My Generation.* "People seized hold of the enormous country, and brushed and beat the dust out of it..." "Life stretched out before us, vast and pliant. Man, people can do all."

Poetry also conveyed the world perception of the masters of life who were capable of transforming it as they saw fit. It is characteristic that in the pre-war poem "Thirst" by Vladimir Zanadvorov, who was killed at the front in the Second World War, we meet the same adjective "pliant":

Before us as from the avian heights,
Wherever you turned your gaze,
The world revealed all the splendour
Of the formidable tasks that remained.
It beckoned to us, bright and alluring,
And pliant almost like ore,
There was a foretaste, the future,
In our drive to work more and more.

The conviction that the world was pliant under purposeful creative impact was also manifest in man's relations with nature. These relations were often regarded as *a struggle against nature,* as an irreconcilable war against its injustices and wrongs. And even the writers whose names are automatically connected in the minds of present-day Soviet readers with the idea of nature conservation, at that time made a point of stressing its imperfections and poeticised the idea of its recreation.

The construction of a chemical works in the arid desert was regarded in Konstantin Paustovsky's novella *The Gulf of Kara-Bugaz* as the accomplishment of task which had been awaiting its hour for a long time and had proved within the powers only of the new system. "The works will teach the inhabitants of the

desert the rudiments of knowledge, make them think right, reveal and annihilate all the horrors of a nomadic existence..." What's more, "it is a daring challenge to the laws of the Universe... We will be drawing upon solar energy, condensing it and turning it into electricity, heat, light and all other forms of energy, and this region will blossom and bloom as, perhaps, the most luxuriant orchards of California have never done."

In Paustovsky's *Kolkhida* (Colchis) a real war is being waged against floods and marshes so as to create subtropical or even tropical climatic conditions in western Georgia. "The manager of the drainage work in Kolkhida, engineer Kakhiani ... took no notice of either the forests, lakes overgrown with water-lilies or countless rivers which forced their way through the green tunnels of foliage. All this was to be destroyed and, as far as he was concerned, merely got in the way." The work of the specialists in land-reclamation is examined in the story through the prism of mankind's history. "You are argonauts. Just as Jason discovered the Golden Fleece here in Kolkhida, so you have discovered the tropics."

The natural elements work against the builders of a new town in Vera Ketlinskaya's *Fortitude*. The river Mizinka in Marietta Shaginyan's *The Hydro-Electric Main* "swelled and seethed after the spring" and moved "a mountainous weapon of stones" against man. The taiga in Ilya Ehrenburg's *The Second Day* opposes the builders like a living creature. "It closed up like a blind wall, hurled gigantic trunks at the approaching newcomers, clawed them with prickly bushes, sent rapid torrents out on reconnaissance and these torrents carried everything away..." Even the record-breaking team of concrete-workers in Katayev's novel *Onwards, Time!* has to cope with a fierce snowstorm. ("The wind swept away cement and sand piled in the wheelbarrows. The crushed stone flew out of the wheelbarrows like splinters from an exploded bomb.. If anything, it was a front with explosions, the noise of an assault and smoke of a gas attack.")

The task of the country's socialist reconstruction was perceived by Soviet literature, first and foremost, as a most complex social one, and was examined through the prism of politics and class struggle. "Should a new factory be built in the district

in question or not? Is a twenty-five or thirty horsepower tractor needed? Are seventeen or fifteen million tons of pig-iron required? All this became politics. The fate of the revolution was being decided here and now." This is an excerpt from Yakov Ilyin's *The Great Conveyor.*

The class struggle was frequently depicted in the form of direct collisions with sabotage, espionage and propaganda attempts of the new system's enemies.

In Leonov's *The River* a former lieutenant of the tsarist army living under the guise of a monk does all he can to disrupt the works' construction.

In Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned* resistance to collectivisation is organised by a White officer by the name of Polovtsev, who appeared unnoticed in Gremyachi Log on the same day as the Party emissary Davydov.

In Yasenksy's *Man Changes His Skin,* after failing to obstruct the canal's construction, an English spy tries to cause as much harm as possible to the new authorities.

In Pogodin's *Tempo* an engineer by the name of Goncharov attempts to slow down the unusually fast pace of the tractor factory's construction by committing acts of sabotage.

In Ketlinskaya's *Fortitude* some saboteurs led by Granatov, the building project's assistant manager, try to hinder the construction of a town in the taiga.

Reading through the books of the 30s, I tried to understand what impact such subjects have nowadays and to what extent they influenced the future of these works. I discovered that the conclusions of my analysis varied. Some books have obviously aged while others have not, and this depended on a fair number of factors.

There is no doubt that the setting up of a socialist industry in the late 20s and early 30s was hampered not by elemental forces of nature alone. There were various kinds of sabotage at enterprises and construction sites and especially in the countryside, the scene of a fierce class struggle. However, everything we now know about the violations of socialist legality at that time causes us to make important amendments to the ideas which then prevailed as to the scale of the class enemies' active opposition to the new system. Reflecting the specific features

of the social consciousness of that time, literature frequently mistook for the intrigues of enemies the inevitable difficulties involved in the country's socialist reconstruction, which it, literature, was still unable to fully understand and explain.

In Leonov's novel *The River* an important part is played by such an episode during the construction of the pulp-and-paper mill: there had been an obstruction in the upper reaches of the Sot caused by some floating logs which had dammed the river. And when they gave way, the water gushed down and flooded the foundation pits, thus ruining the results of the builders' work of many months.

Following the laws of epic art, Leonov depicts this natural calamity as the river's revolt against its new masters and links this natural phenomenon to the social processes taking place in the country. The flood had consequences which were very characteristic of people's frame of mind at the time. "Nobody believed that the Sot had burst by chance," one reads in the novel. "Public opinion searched for culprits." And everyone's eyes were fixed on Renne, an old specialist, who had helped Uvadiev build the works. "From the very start of the work the builders had felt he was an alien who might not do much harm but would certainly not be of sufficient help." The workers' confrontation with wrongly-accused Renne ends with him shooting himself.

In exactly the same way the heroes of a number of other works try to fix on someone the responsibility for their difficulties, even when the latter have nothing to do with personal interference. For instance, the work pace has been set too high, hold-ups have cropped up in supplies or the production techniques are primitive. Here we have a social and psychological complex which does much to explain what happened at the time: the masses' readiness to make any sacrifice in order to defend the system which they considered their achievement and which had opened up unprecedented prospects for working people; the fact that everything was perceived through the prism of the class struggle; the rejection of any insurmountable objective circumstances; owing to their lack of historical experience, people were naturally unable to recognise and single out the contradictions which had made themselves felt within the new system. Of course,

this does not justify the infringements of the law which occurred in the 30s but it enables one to understand the atmosphere in which they arose.

Now let us return to the question of the subsequent fate of books written in this period. If the class struggle on the economic front was reflected by writers as part of the complex picture of reality, as one of the hues characterising the life of society at a time of great social change, such books retained their significance as literary documents of the age. This is quite true, for instance, of Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned,* Malyshkin's *People from the Back of Beyond* and Leonov's *The River.* On the other hand, when these collisions blotted out everything else and created the impression that the class struggle was the main contradiction of the age of socialist construction, this had a detrimental effect on the works. In my opinion, it is impossible to imagine Pogodin's plays *Tempo* or *A Poem about an Axe* on a contemporary stage; Ketlinskaya's novel *Fortitude* has aged too because of its oversimplified plot and structure.

Recalling the age of the struggle for socialism, contemporary poet Evgeny Vinokurov wrote the poem "Thirst":

At nights it consumed young people.
Where are you, years to come?
No, never has the old world
Seen such thirst for an ideal!
And gathered somewhere under a lime-tree
With guileless children on their laps,
Womenfolk, smiling spell-bound,
Listened to tales of future times...

The poet found just the right words to express one of the distinctive features of the social atmosphere of the age. One may disagree with him only on one account: when in those days people spoke and dreamed of a happy, joyful life, they did not have the "future times" in mind. The literary works of the 20s and 30s re-created a situation in which the ideal was somehow very concrete and tangible. It was no longer in the misty, remote future but right there, at their door, so to

speak, and to attain it, all that had to be done was build new factories, organise collective farms and give the country tractors, paper and metal. As we have already quoted: "The vast five-year plan swept through all the nooks and crannies of life, and its ends projected into a dream. . ." "Iron and machinery!. ." exclaimed Podoprigora in Malyshkin's *People from the Back of Beyond,* "but what are they for? So that man can have a carefree, happy future." "What do you think we're here for?" asks one of the heroes of Ketlinskaya's *Fortitude.* "What are we giving up our health for, working ankle-deep in swamp water, and still not giving in? . . .It's to build a new sort of life, a better life, an easier and richer life for everybody, so's there'll be lots of fun and joy for everybody."

However, it is not simply a question of the near or distant future. The very reality depicted by writers was ideal. I do not mean this in a simple everyday way, as it is common knowledge how much deprivation and hardship there was in those days. What I have in mind is the aesthetic ideal, "the ideal of freedom forming the base of the concept of beauty".

A hero of Yakov Ilyin's *The Great Conveyor,* for instance, looks round "fully aware of the fact that he, Gazgan, had discovered the true essence and meaning of happiness in his organisational work, creativity, love of life and complete faith in the rightness of his Party's ideas". "We want to live life to the full. And that is what everything, the new factories, tempos, tractors and conveyors, are for. . ."

I am not writing a history of Soviet literature and so I do not have to try and give as full a picture as possible of the literary life at any given period. However, I should like to emphasise here that the literature of the 30s by no means consists only of books about construction projects of the first five-year plans.

It was a complex and contradictory time, a time of ardent enthusiasm on the part of the builders of the new world, of the growing danger of war, of the happiness of gained freedom and the tragedy of arbitrary repressions. Despite all the obstacles in the way, a truly renascent feeling of the fullness of life and proximity of the Promised Land prevailed in the people's minds. "You're close by, distant clime of socialism"

was the characteristic title given by Boris Pasternak to one of his poems of that time.

It was a period in which the country, stretching from the Baltic to the Pacific Ocean, was truly discovered by its inhabitants, a happy time in which different nations got to know one another. Writers were constantly putting aside their work in order to travel to the Arctic North or the Far East and be present at extraordinary and exciting events, and meet friends from other national republics. The outstanding verses of the famous Ukrainian poet Pavlo Tychina, Byelorussian Yanka Kupala, Azerbaijanian Samed Vurgun, Georgian Galaktion Tabidze, and Armenian Yegishe Charentz began appearing in talented Russian translations... In 1934 representatives of fifty-two nationalities gathered for the first writers' congress which was an unforgettable occasion for young Soviet literature.

It was a time in which great epic novels, future classics of Soviet literature, were either being written or completed: Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don,* Alexei Tolstoy's *Ordeal,* Gorky's *The Life of Klim Samgin.* It was also a heyday for the Soviet historical novel (Alexei Tolstoy's *Peter the Great,* Forsh's *Radishchev,* Tynyanov's *Pushkin,* Shishkov's *Emelyan Pugachev,* Novikov-Priboi's *Tsushima,* Antonovskaya's *The Great Mouravi*). It was a time in which the unique genre of Soviet children's literature came into being. Its founders were Chukovsky, Gaidar, Kassil, Bianki and Mikhalkov.

The literature of the 30s is amazingly varied. Nikolai Ostrovsky, a bed-ridden veteran of the Civil War, became a national hero overnight after the publication of his ingenuous novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* a history of his generation. Ilf and Petrov wrote their best satirical novel *The Golden Calf.* Yevgeny Shvarts attained consummate mastership in his allegoric tales for the stage *The Shadow* and *The Naked King.* Mikhail Prishvin wrote some profound stories about nature with a philosophic message. The hallmark of talent and strong individuality was evident in the works of Yuri Olesha, Andrei Platonov, Mikhail Bulgakov and Pavel Bazhov.

In short, for all its complexities and contradictions it was a most fruitful period for literary creativity and contributed a great many truly valuable works to Soviet culture.

4. THE PEOPLE GOES TO WAR

On the morning of June 22, 1941, an event took place which abruptly changed the Soviet people's life: fascist German troops, armed to the teeth, well-trained and war-hardened, poured across its western border. The commanders of Army Groups "North", "Centre" and "South" of the German Wehrmacht had at their disposal 190 divisions numbering five and a half million men. As military historians later calculated, the Germans flung 3,712 tanks, 4,950 aircraft and 47,260 guns and mortars into battle.

The country was in mortal danger. It was only later, after the war, that the details of Hitler's *Barbarossa* and *Ost* plans became known: they stipulated the total destruction of Moscow and Leningrad, the extermination of eighty million people in the European part of the country and the settlement of this territory by millions of German colonists. However, in 1941-42 the invaders' actions were already telling their own tale. Hundreds of towns, over 70,000 villages and 32,000 industrial enterprises were reduced to ruins. Despite the Soviet Army's heroic resistance in the initial stages of the war and despite the unusually heavy losses, set-backs and deeply-felt defeats suffered by Hitler's troops, by the autumn of 1942 the Germans had reached the Volga and could see the snow-capped ridges of the Caucasus. The Soviet Union lost a part of its territory which before the war had been inhabited by forty per cent of its population and had produced over half its metal and sixty-three per cent of its coal.

With all these facts in mind, many people abroad came to the conclusion that nazi Germany was likely to gain the upper hand. It seemed impossible for Russia to survive such tremendous losses, just as it was for her to defeat such an experienced and powerful enemy. However, people thought differently in the Soviet Union even in the most difficult months of the war. It was unthinkable to give in, and unthinkable to suffer a defeat. It was out of the question because this would entail the people's enslavement and annihilation.

How then was a way out finally found to what seemed like a hopeless situation? How was this most powerful enemy halt-

ed, worn out and then successfully repulsed? A lot may be said here. To put it most briefly, I would say that the nazi invaders were finally crushed thanks to the fact that during the 1,418 days and nights of the war the tens of millions of men and women constituting the Soviet people did much more to gain a victory than was humanly possible.

The impossible was achieved by the workers and specialists who in 1941 evacuated over 1,500 major factories to the east and provided the fighting army with an increasing flow of arms and, what's more, with arms of the highest quality.

The impossible was achieved by the collective farmers who fed the army and country despite the fact that the best land was in enemy hands and that most of the able-bodied men had gone off to the war.

The impossible was achieved by the millions of people living in enemy-occupied territory: the nazis immediately had to contend with a second front inside the country which diverted vast numbers of forces onto itself.

The impossible was achieved by the army which halted the fascist shock troops outside Leningrad and Moscow, held Stalingrad, and then fought fierce battles all the way from the Caucasus to Berlin, disabling ten million enemy officers and men (of the thirteen million six hundred thousand fascist Germany lost, killed, wounded and taken prisoner).

The impossible was, in fact, achieved because our people had national, social and spiritual values which proved more important to people than life itself.

Twenty million dead at the fronts, in enemy-occupied territory and nazi concentration camps—that is the tremendously high price of our victory. Nobody in our country has ever tried to depreciate the contribution of our allies in the rout of fascism but the facts speak for themselves. Six hundred thousand victims of the blockade and battles around the city are buried at Piskarevsky Cemetery in Leningrad, that is, considerably more than the United States of America lost during the entire war.

Finally, a few additional figures which testify not only to the extremely fierce battles but even more so to the strong morale of the people who defended their country. During the

war some five hundred Soviet pilots rammed their planes into enemy aircraft and over three hundred and fifty others directed their burning planes at the enemy's amassed equipment. There are records of more than seventy cases in which Soviet soldiers covered the fire-spitting enemy gun-ports with their own bodies. And it is simply impossible to count the number of soldiers who threw themselves with bunches of hand-grenades under enemy tanks at crucial moments of battles...

* * *

War is one of the conditions of society which give rise to epic art. Such was the conclusion reached by Hegel when considering the laws of the interaction between art and reality. "In the most general terms," he said, "one can point to a conflict caused by a state of war as a situation corresponding most to the epic. During a war, the entire nation is set in motion and, united, experiences a new upsurge and begins to act energetically in so far as monolithic unity as such has a cause here for standing its ground."[42]

Do all wars provide a "basis for epic action"? No. Hegel excludes various kinds of civil feuds and other incidents of an episodic or fortuitous nature. A conflict between nations opposing one another—that is the domain of the epos. Moreover, he noted, "a third side is also bound to join in: a universal and historical justification impelling a nation to come out against another".[43]

From this point of view Hegel examines the *Ramayana, The Iliad,* and the works of Ossian, Tasso and Ariosto. Contradicting his own conclusion to the effect that epic art had exhausted itself historically, he suggests "thinking about the epics which will possibly appear in the future..." It is curious that he imagined the arena of the future epic events to be swiftly-developing America and not well-established Europe. "For in Europe each people is kept within its frontiers by its neighbours and cannot on its own start a war with any other European nation and if it ventures beyond the boundaries of Europe, it can head only towards America."[44]

However, an epic event did, in fact, take place in Europe only five years before Hegel read his first course of aesthetics at Heidelberg University: the Patriotic War of 1812, in which the Russian people upheld its integrity and independence in its struggle against Napoleon's invasion. It is well-known what a profound impact this event had on Russian culture.

"The national war," wrote famous 19th-century literary critic Belinsky, "which aroused, summoned and strained every inner nerve of the people, which constituted an epoch in its ... history and exerted influence on all its subsequent life, such a war is by its scale an epic event and provides a wealth of material for the epic."[45] And then, "...The year 1812, which shook the whole of Russia from end to end, roused her dormant forces and revealed to her hitherto unsuspected wells of strength; it welded, by a sense of common danger, all the diffused interests of private wills, blunted through desuetude, into a single huge mass, stirred up the national consciousness and national pride..."[46]

If one forgot when this was written, one might easily think that Belinsky was referring to Lev Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, the consummate epic work of 19th-century Russian literature. In any case, the great critic correctly pointed out the *only event* in 19th-century Russian history which might and did, in fact, form the base of a monumental epic work.

Let us recall one episode of the novel. After the Battle of Borodino Pierre is spending the night at the Russian troops' billets. " 'What is most difficult (Pierre went on thinking or hearing in his sleep) is to be able to unite everything's meaning in one's heart. Unite everything?' Pierre asked himself. 'No, you can't unite thoughts but you can *connect* them all, yes, that's what you have to do! Yes, you've got to *connect* them, that's it!' Pierre enthusiastically repeated to himself, feeling that it was with these words and them alone that he could express what he wished to express and thereby solve the problem which had been plaguing him.

" 'Yes, you've got to connect them, it's time to connect them.'

" 'Yes, we've got to harness 'em, it's time to harness 'em, Your Excellency!..'

"It was the riding-master waking Pierre."

Thus, confusing dreams and reality, Pierre searches for the answer to the complex spiritual problems tormenting him. And in doing so, it seems he comes up with a definition of the unique qualities of an epic novel. "Connecting everything's meaning"—isn't this the task of a writer who has ventured beyond the bounds of the traditional novel and intends to show the advance of history and movement of popular life? However, one can only do so when there is an event which *involves everyone* and forces everyone to define his position and in one way or another show his worth in the course of a great national action.

In Tolstoy's novel reality and the ideal, a false life, enmeshed in conventions, and a true life which ought to be man's real destination, are constantly "connected", setting off one another.

Princess Maria gives us an insight into Prince Andrei's character when she says: "He needs activity and this quiet measured life is destroying him." Prince Andrei longs for a cause which would be sanctified by great goals, and finds the empty bustle all around intolerably irksome. Why does he enlist in the army? "I'm going because this life I'm leading now is not for me!" "Salons, idle rumours, balls, vanity, pettiness... This is the vicious circle I can't get out of."

For only an instant did Prince Andrei glimpse the infinitely high sky as he lay wounded on the battlefield of Austerlitz. ("Yes! Everything's empty, everything's a fraud except this infinite sky. Nothing else exists besides it...") And then quiet, measured, meaningless life began again.

The "vicious circle" which Prince Andrei speaks of is a phenomenon with far-reaching objective properties. And it is the formidable threat hanging over Russia which breaks this circle and results in the people's firm unity, no matter how short-lived and relative it may be, and merges, in Belinsky's words, "all the diffused interests of private wills... into a single huge mass". The heavenly vault rises, revealing distant climes to Andrei, Pierre, Natasha and the other morally integral heroes of the novel. "It looked as if everything all around was bound to fall apart and change... Moscow unwittingly went on with its usual life although it knew that the day of doom was at

hand when all the conventions, which one had been used to obeying, would fall apart!. . ."

Everything that Hegel spoke of in his study of the characteristics of the epic situation applies to the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 with one specification: no events of the past may be, in fact, compared to this war. Never before had such vast numbers of people come into motion and been affected to such an extent by a war. Never before had "the struggle for the preservation of such integrity and its right to exist" been so fierce and acute. Never before did a people who had risen to fight have such a large universal and historical justification. The fate of all mankind, including even the physical existence of whole nations, directly depended on the outcome of this war.

"This war our people proudly fight, a righteous, holy war. . ." These are words from a rousing song composed just after the outbreak of war. The image of a country which, after the alarm had been sounded, stood up to fight a mortal battle against the aggressors and the image of a people who was set in motion by the enemy's invasion are distinctive features of our war literature. And just as in the books about the projects of the first five-year plan, life itself presented similar pictures to writers and sometimes made pages of one book seem like the continuation of another.

In his novella *The People Are Immortal* Vasili Grossman wrote: "The car sped along the road: sooty dust, brick dust, yellowish dust, fine grey dust—making one's face like that of a corpse to look, clouds of dust hang over these roads at the front. This dust is raised by hundreds of thousands of Red Army boots, truck wheels, tank tracks, towing vehicles, guns, flocks of sheep and droves of pigs, the hoofs of horses, and great herds of cows, collective-farm tractors, and the creaking carts of refugees. . ."

In his novella *The Unsubdued* Boris Gorbatov writes: "Strings of wagons, carts loaded with hay and empty cartridge cases, first-aid wagons, and square mobile radio-station booths passed by; overdriven horses wearily clattered ahead; holding onto gun-carriages, dusty grey soldiers dragged themselves along, all heading further and further east, past Ostraya Mogila, towards

Krasnodon, then Kamensk, then the Severny Donets... And the air all around was rent with alarm, screams and groans, with creaking wheels, clanking iron, hoarse swearing, the moans of the wounded, the cries of children and it was as if the road itself was creaking and groaning under the wheels and rushing along terror between the hillsides..."

In Alexander Fadeyev's novel *The Young Guard* this stream reaches Krasnodon. "Not since the days of the great people's migration had the Donets steppe witnessed such a movement of people as took place in July 1942... Along highways and country lanes, over the open steppe, with the scorching sun beating down, retreating Red Army troops marched endlessly with their supplies, artillery and tanks; following them came children from children's homes and kindergartens, carts and lorries and herds of cattle, columns of refugees, in small groups or singly, pushing wheelbarrows with bundles and cases of personal belongings and children perched on top... As they went they trampled the ripe and ripening corn and no one grieved, neither he that trampled it down nor he who had sown it... The air was so filled with dust that you could look at the sun without squinting."

Let us recall the raucous motley crowd in *The Iron Flood*—people searching not only for salvation from ruthless enemies but also for the way to a new life. Let us recall the scenes of packed trains during the first five-year plans, when "Russia had torn up its roots" and headed for the innumerable construction sites. We find all this in the novels of Malyshkin, Leonov and Ehrenburg. And now again, in books about the first years of the war we see noisy, crowded stations, overflowing trains, and dusty roads which are packed with people, vehicles, carts, wheelbarrows, and herds of cattle.

This coincidence is not the main point but in all these cases the seething crowds and movement of vast masses proved to be the first sign of the epic state of the world which was arising in the country, and an indication that "everything all around was bound to fall apart and change". The normal tenor of life changed abruptly, established relations were broken, and a whirlwind whipped up from which it was impossible for anyone to escape.

The Great Patriotic War was a special event in the people's life. A sharp, distinct line divided the world into one's own kind and aliens, friends and enemies. One all-embracing socio-historical conflict arose and eclipsed everything else in its significance. And there were no alternatives but freedom or slavery, victory or defeat, life or death. The sense of history and the sense of the continuity of time which the fascist oppressors intended to destroy became clearer and more tangible than ever. Man became strongly aware of the fact that he was part of two great communities: his nationality and the entire Soviet people. In the end, everything came down to one goal, universal, national and at the same time deeply personal for every participant in the events: to crush and destroy fascism.

It is impossible not to notice how quickly Soviet literature was put on a war footing and became, as Alexei Tolstoy put it, the builder "of the fortress of the people's soul". One of the reasons for literature's swift "mobilisation" was that the sphere of the literary epos had been discovered, explored and mastered back in the 20s and 30s. And when the new epic state of the world emerged and required further development in this direction, writers were inwardly prepared and found it natural to create epics in poetry and prose.

In the autumn of 1942 successive chapters of Vanda Vasilevskaya's *Rainbow,* one of the first novellas based on the heroic and tragic war material, appeared in the *Izvestia* newspaper. The decades which have passed since then have confirmed the literary integrity and value of this work written in a graphically epic vein.

On the very first pages of the novella we are presented with a picture of the profound petrified stillness of a Ukrainian village. The heavy frost has frozen the ground solid, and every now and then an alarming and unusual sign appears in the sky—a winter rainbow. However, it is not so much the winter as the fascist occupation which has condemned the three hundred huts scattered along the snowy road to gloomy silence.

Fedosya Kravchuk looks out of the window at this road. Her soldier son has been killed in a battle on the outskirts of his native village and is now lying there like a statue of ice. And along the road the nazis are driving Olena Kostyuk, bare-

footed and pregnant, trying to make her give information about the partisans. "Looking at Olena, Fedosya felt that it was she running barefooted through the snow, naked and completely vulnerable to the soldiers' insults and abuse, that it was her feet bitten by the frozen snow and her back jabbed by the steel bayonets. It was not Olena Kostyuk, it was the entire village being driven through the snow by the soldiers' laughter. It was not Olena Kostyuk, it was the entire village falling face down in the snow and getting up heavily under the blows of rifle butts. . ."

A boy who tried to give Olena a crust of bread was killed; Olena herself perished with her new-born son. The hostages taken by the nazis are in danger of being shot. Death haunted the village. "It whirled in white clouds along the road, raged like a whirlwind over the roof-tops; it forced its way through cracks in walls, tousled the thatched roofs, mercilessly shook the last lime-trees along the road which had not yet been cut down by the Germans. . ."

The village pays silent tribute to its dead. Now, during the occupation nobody even thinks of singing, once a favourite pastime. "What song can tell of everything that is happening on both sides of the Dnieper and across all the boundless Ukrainian land? What song can convey the terrible days of darkness, which fell upon this land suddenly like a plague, a flood, an evil wind that has ruined many a home? What song can absorb the rivers of blood, the creaking gallows, the moaning of children, thousands and thousands of dead, the black mist hanging over the villages, countless graves and the young lads who have died in Rudi and in hundreds of other places behind the barbed wire of concentration camps?"

The epic novella attempts to convey what a song is unable to: each image here has both concrete and universal meaning and many represent the entire village and also the entire land surrounded by enemy hordes.

Bright, contrasting graphic colours divide the opposing forces in the novella. The invaders are opposed by the whole village which has no traitors (both the village elder and the German commandant's mistress are newcomers). And although each villager hides in his own hut and suffers the unprecedent-

ed calamity alone, they all make up a people who has been united by the strongest spiritual bonds. This causes the nazis to feel they are confronted by an enemy who has not surrendered his arms rather than a submissive civilian community.

The circumstances which Vasilevskaya's characters have to deal with, at first, seem omnipotent and insurmountable. How can defenceless old people, women and children oppose the armed occupationists' tyranny? Only with their feelings concealed behind their silent determination. However, these are special feelings which have been aroused and greatly intensified by the most extreme historical situation: the feeling of patriotism and that of the continuity of generations. In the final count, steel and iron prove powerless in the face of such feelings.

A woman revealed to her neighbour that it was her son who was trying to pass the crust of bread to Olena. The Germans have taken some people hostage, one of whom is this neighbour's husband, old Grokhach, and are threatening to shoot them if they do not give away the boy's family. Should she give herself up? Grokhach's wife indignantly casts this thought out of her mind.

" 'Well, tell me this, my good people? Whose husband is he —yours or mine? Well, I'm keeping calm and quiet. What's to be, will be. He'll get killed if that's his fate, and if it isn't he won't. And, anyway, it's better to be dead than live under the Germans. . .' "

In the cold barn where the hostages are waiting to be executed, old Grokhach reasons in almost the same way:

" 'Our strength lies in us standing our ground and not giving in. Our strength lies in us keeping silent when we've got to. . . The main thing is to realise that all this is going to end and none of 'em is going to get out of here alive.' "

In her work Vasilevskaya stressed the general features of the people's life and struggle under the yoke of fascism. Boris Gorbatov's novella *The Unsubdued* (1943), which also describes Soviet people's resistance to the foreign aggressors, differs from *Rainbow* in that its characters are more individualised. It has a central hero who is the representative and spokesman of the whole people.

The epic form of *The Unsubdued* is accentuated. It has much in common with Gogol's romantic novella *Taras Bulba* from which it deliberately borrows the names of the father and one of the sons (Taras and Andrei), its language and style (its special rhythm, folkloric elements and repetitions).

In Gorbatov's novella two poles arise sharply on an epic scale: man and the world. Man is represented by a hereditary worker and head of a large family, whose whole life has consisted in his family and his work and in contributing to the establishment of a socialist state in his country. And the world is the unbearable world of the occupation in which the recent past has been rejected and everything is hostile and alien. "There were no laws. There were no trials, no justice, law or order. There were only decrees. Every decree carried a threat. Every one was a prohibition. The decrees precisely defined which rights the citizens had been deprived of. It was a constitution of the deprivation of human rights. A man's life became cheaper than the type-written paper sentencing him to death."

There are no "trials, no justice, law and order" but the epic hero embodies them all himself. Insurmountable obstacles bar his way but his strength of character, opposing the harsh, inhuman circumstances, increases accordingly. Watching the last retreating division of Soviet troops, Taras Yatsenko is overwhelmed by a feeling of responsibility for everything that will happen to those who remain behind. He looked at his fellows and realised: "...they now have nobody else in the world, except him, an old man; he alone is responsible in the eyes of the world and other people for all his family, for every one of them, for their lives and for their souls."

During the occupation the town has become impossible to live in, for all its impoverished people seem to have gone deaf and dumb. But one has got to live. "How should one live? This was a question nobody could shrug off. It was impossible to say to yourself that this did not concern you. Everyone in the town was faced with the dilemma of how to live and what to do. And everyone had to decide for himself and for his own conscience."

And this applies to Taras Yatsenko, too. Nothing is left of his former life except his faith. "This town was built with my

hands and destroyed with them and it will be me who restores it to life. Like a disease, a famine, the Germans will torment us for a while and then vanish. They are a temporary disaster." Taras says to his neighbour Nazar: "No, they're not the bosses in our town—they're outsiders. And they'll leave just as they came."

For the time being neither Taras nor Nazar nor the other inhabitants of the town are capable of coping with the calamity and of making the outsiders leave. And so they have only one other alternative: to do everything in their power to resist the order which has been imposed on them by aliens, and stubbornly and categorically reject their world.

After being released from captivity, Taras' son, Andrei, comes home and senses that he has left his soul behind in the concentration camp. "But his old father's soul is free. It can't be put in chains. No, Taras' immortal brave soul can't be enmeshed in barbed wire. And all of a sudden he felt terribly envious of his father."

Old Taras persistently wages his own war against the fascists. He has not let them use his skilful hands and in the mornings only goes with the other old men to the factory under escort. "But each of them held his head high and straight. With their ebbing strength and determination not to be subdued, which was even stronger than physical strength, they were trying to walk proudly and with dignity. It was really as if they looked upon this convoy as an honour." " 'No, they aren't prisoners,' Andrei could not help thinking. 'They're unsubdued.' "

In the final stages of the war Alexander Fadeyev's novel *The Young Guard* continued the theme of Vasilevskaya's and Gorbatov's novellas. Fadeyev began work on this novel at the end of 1943 and its first installment was published in a literary journal in February 1945.

As someone whose adolescence coincided with the war years, I can testify to the profound emotional impact Fadeyev's novel had on its first readers. It became forever a part of their inner world along with the other best literary works, films and songs of that time.

The work's epic quality lies in its design and, what's more, in the emotion which impelled the writer to put pen to paper.

Fadeyev meant to show that the young generation had deeply absorbed the principles of the new life which had been created after the revolution. And this became particularly evident when the young people found themselves in the extreme conditions of the war and nazi occupation. They decided to fight the enemy because their social and moral nature told them to and because they could not do otherwise... The novel's exposition is unhurried in the epic tradition. Fadeyev closely examines the faces of the young people who are living in the mining town of Krasnodon when the devastating war breaks out. These young people are all very different but what is most important is that they have all spent the sixteen-odd years of their lives in the atmosphere of the new social system. Common features formed by this system are distinctly visible in their appearance and behaviour: their striving to be useful to society, collectivism, sense of dignity, love of freedom, democratic attitudes and high moral standards. And all these features are not superficial but, on the contrary, form the essence of their characters and a pivot which may only be broken but not bent.

The underground youth organisation was active in Krasnodon for about a hundred days in October, November and December 1942, the hardest months of battles on the furthest fortification lines which the aggressors managed to reach. They marked a turning-point in the course of the war which was attained through the struggle, labour, self-sacrifice and immense efforts of millions of Soviet people on both sides of the front. The Young Guard, who gave their lives fighting the enemy, also contributed to this cause.

This readiness for action in the name of the loftiest universal goals turns into action itself. A handful of young people challenge the nazi occupation regime and join in a fight against the fascists and their underlings. The days of this struggle are depicted by the author as a time of the greatest upsurge of all the physical and spiritual energies of its participants, of their fullest existence, of their self-abnegating union with the actions and dreams of the fighting people. This is the culmination of the epic novel, the climax of the aesthetic ideal which is affirmed by the writer with profound feeling.

When describing the struggle in the fascist rearlines the writers had to do with a strongly pronounced epic situation. Here man was left to his own resources and had to decide himself how to act. But can one speak of an epic when people are in the army and have to carry out the orders of their superiors and are, seemingly, deprived of independent choice and action? It appears that one can, as in a great war of liberation the goals of the entire people do not differ from those of the individual.

In Vasili Grossman's novella *The People Are Immortal* (1942) both these situations are, as it were, joined together. We are presented with a military unit, to be more precise, with one of the units which found itself in the enemy's rear during the German advance. The armed men force their way through to their fellow units, trying to catch up with the Soviet armies heading east amidst the fiercest battles.

There are two main heroes in the book: Commissar Bogarev and Private Ignatiev. The former is an intellectual, and former professor of one of Moscow's institutes, the latter comes from a village. Hence the difference in their perception of all the events which are taking place. Inwardly, however, the heroes develop along the same lines. Passing through the grim school of war, both rise spiritually, and each of them begins to realise more clearly what he is defending and what he is fighting against with ever-increasing determination and skill.

From the edge of a forest Ignatiev watches the Germans setting down and making themselves at home in a village they have just captured. And all of a sudden he sees everything he has experienced during the war in a somewhat different light. It becomes perfectly clear that the war is being fought for the people's very life. He cannot imagine that the fascists will win and stay on in the village forever. "Ignatiev involuntarily patted the butt of his tommy gun and grasped a grenade in order to reassure himself of his strength, of his own readiness to fight. . ."

Commissar Bogarev feels something similar. "And the world shuddered at the blows of the war. The war crept under the friable soil, hid beneath the waters, rose tens of thousands of metres over the earth, stormed in the woods, on the fields, over

quiet ponds overgrown with duckweed, over rivers and towns, knowing neither day nor night. And Bogarev thought: if Hitler should win this war, there would be no sun for the world, no stars or beautiful nights like this."

And then rumbling close-by was the front-line. A battle began whose plan, devised by Bogarev, was to make a sudden attack on the enemy positions from both sides. "Bogarev ran ahead and an unwonted emotion seized his entire being. He drew the men after him, but they, too, bound to him in a single, eternal and indivisible whole, seemed to be impelling him forward. He heard their heavy breathing behind him, and the rapid, heated beating of their hearts was transmitted to him. This was the people who had won their land in battle. Bogarev heard the tramp of boots, and this was the tread of all Russia passing over to the attack."

In Leonid Leonov's novella *The Taking of Velikoshumsk* (1944) we are again in the midst of the war described in a philosophical, epic narrative. The actual details of the war, in this case episodes from the story of a Soviet tank's daring raid along the enemy's rear-lines, are perceived in a highly individual style, which is characteristic of the author. But from a broader viewpoint these events reflect phenomena of a far-reaching, universal nature.

General Litovchenko, a tank corps commander, leads his men into battle in the name of truth and the people's happy future. He regards the war as one of the decisive clashes between the past and the future. "...We have decided to help history. We are holding the fate of progress like a fledgling in our hardened palms. It appears that nobody cherishes it as much as we do."

Just as in Vasili Grossman's novella, the commander's reflections naturally concur with the thoughts and aspirations of his subordinates. Driving his tank towards almost certain death, Sobolkov also longs "to help history": "You can reckon that where you are now, Vasya, is the most important spot in the whole world. Because history ... is also a tank, so just make sure you grip the levers tight!"

The description of Sobolkov in action is accompanied by a commentary, characteristic of the author: "During this most

dangerous raid his feeling of festive elation never left him... I use 'festive' here in the same way it was used by the tellers of traditional epic poems and heroic songs who often replaced the words 'battle' and 'foray' by 'festival' and 'feast'."

The conventionally symbolic plots in the literature of the war years competed with another type of narrative which recreated in detail the people's lives at the war. The latter was definitely preferred by Konstantin Simonov. Captain Saburov and the other characters of his novella *Days and Nights* (1944) evidently find it easier to repulse yet another enemy attack than engage in philosophical debates or utter the lofty words which are so typical of Bogarev, Ignatiev, Litovchenko and Sobolkov.

It is impossible to say which of these two approaches to portraying history in progress is the more profound and lasting. Leonov's symbolic images are still a living monument to the time. However, we would indeed be worse off without Simonov's descriptions of the daily round of the defenders of Stalingrad, especially as this everyday life was so remarkable, historic and full of heroic content. By laying special emphasis on this aspect of front-line life, the author was able to convey the psychological turning-point which accompanied the turning-point in the course of the war: the confidence of Soviet soldiers in their strength, and their ability, acquired during one year of war, to carry out their duty in a calm, routine manner even in the most difficult conditions.

We thus see two different ways of reflecting an epic situation in fiction. One makes use of symbols, conventions, a romantic, elevated style and poetic folk imagery. The other relies on the tradition of social-psychological realism. However, the latter is also an example of epic art. The unfolding of the plot in Simonov's novella is inseparable from historical developments (in this instance, the history of the defence of Stalingrad). The hero, who is reluctant to speak of lofty goals, is nevertheless bound to them by the very nature of his activity.

Galina Nikolayeva's story *The Death of an Army Commander* (1945) is also about the hardest days of the Battle of Stalingrad. At its centre is a man with exceptional talents who is killed at the very start of his military service.

Far from being an Army Commander, Anton is, in fact, only

a tankman fresh from a military training school. However, he has a certain magnetic quality, which attracts others, and he shows signs of having a strategic way of thinking. "Wherever Anton appeared, people always obeyed him cheerfully and readily and he led them in the same cheerful, responsible manner."

Then came Anton's first—and last—battle in the steppe near Stalingrad. His tank tore ahead with dozens of other vehicles. "Not only with his mind and heart but also with his whole body he experienced happiness, its chill and slight giddiness, and he suddenly felt like bursting out laughing and whooping and shouting out. He experienced a powerful need for action, and he felt uplifted, and all his forces had become concentrated to the utmost." And then all of a sudden there was an explosion, flames and thunder followed by the unbearable silence of a hospital.

Lying in the cabin of a hospital ship, the hero of Nikolayeva's story astounds his fellows with his calmness and self-control. "In his heart of hearts he knew he was already dead. He knew for sure that his former self with his former character and life had ceased to be." The fascists were firing point-blank at the ship from guns. And when only he and a doctor by the name of Katerina Ivanovna were left on it, Anton gave her his life-belt and asked her to find him a rifle. "Overcoming his pain, he gently stroked her head and comforted her as if it was she who was staying behind to die on the ship. He felt grateful to her because by looking helpless, she had given him the joy of feeling strong and courageous again."

Although the story is called *The Death of an Army Commander,* it is in fact about the *birth* of an epic hero who directs all his thoughts and efforts to the solution of a gigantic historical task, a hero who perceives not only the battle ahead but also the war as a whole, who fights on to the end for his ideals, simply and naturally doing what he can in a hopeless situation, that is, dying with a gun in his hands.

"An unwonted emotion seized his entire being," we read in Grossman's novella. "His feeling of festive elation never left him," writes Leonov. And again in Nikolayeva's story, we read, "He experienced happiness..." Are these coincidences or not?

The great war of liberation was an event of manifold significance. It was a tragedy for the people, bringing pain, suffering and death to millions. However, it also offered man the joy of becoming one with his people, allowed him to fully give of himself and reveal his potentialities to the full when he had to overcome what seemed like insurmountable difficulties and hardships. A good example of this is seen in Olga Bergholtz's *February Diary* about the feat of Leningraders during the blocade:

> *In mire and murk, in hunger and grieving,*
> *Where death, our shadow, followed at our heel,*
> *We often then had such a happy feeling,*
> *And with such gusty freedom we were breathing,*
> *That all our grandsons well may envy feel...*

(Translated by Walter May)

It is worth noting that the first two epic waves in Soviet literature carried, first and foremost, the heroic leader of the masses on their crests. You may find numerous examples of this type of epic hero such as Gorky's Pavel Vlasov, Furmanov's Chapayev, Serafimovich's Kozhukh, Fadeyev's Levinson, Gladkov's Chumalov, Leonov's Uvadiev and Kurilov, and Sholokhov's Davydov. These heroes are inseparably bound to the working masses and act in their interests and on their authority but, nevertheless, in all these instances one is dealing with mature leaders or leaders in the making. During the war nine times out of ten it is an ordinary person who becomes an epic hero. Such is the case with Vasili Tyorkin in Alexander Tvardovsky's poem of the same name.

While writing *War and Peace,* Tolstoy could not decide how to define the genre of his work. The epic situation linked with the Patriotic War of 1812 had torn asunder the framework of the traditional family and even historical novel and opposed the conventional denouement of the plots. The great writer eventually rejected all the formal canons and concentrated solely on finding the best ways of conveying the powerful stream of popular life caught up in the vortex of war.

And here, too, we find that *Vasili Tyorkin* is not a poem but a "Book About a Soldier", which is a wider concept. And again it is an epic without a beginning or an end, whose main subject is the war itself.

However, Tvardovsky's book does not follow the external events of the war and does not even contain descriptions of its most famous battles. The poet focuses his attention on the people at war and man at war. And it is this life during the war which forms the book's inner framework. It is a life fraught with drama, enriched with high goals and full of joy and sorrow.

Tyorkin, who might he be, pray?
No need to be chary:
He's a fellow, you might say,
Rather ordinary...

(Translated by Alex Miller)

In actual fact, what could be more ordinary than a young collective farm worker from the Smolensk area who had been called up to the war? He was wounded, fell into enemy encirclement and suffered the retreat with his fellows. He lay in marshes, forced crossings over rivers, fought hand-to-hand against the fascists, and came under bomb and shell attacks, sometimes even from his own side... In short, he went through everything a Soviet soldier had to and learnt to live and to win with death always at his side. Together with millions like him, he determined, in his own way, the course of events of that stormy 20th century which was so crucial for the history of mankind.

Tyorkin, who epitomises the people at war, sometimes refers to himself in the plural:

To the long route-marsh accustomed,
Often on the dusty road
I've been partially dispersed, and
I've been partially destroyed...

(Translated by Alex Miller)

Tyorkin is also a man with his own life-story, his own habits and distinctive features. Just enough details are given to make him a living person and not just an impersonal abstraction.

Tyorkin is a Russian but he reflects in his own way qualities which were characteristic of all Soviet nations at the war. And Tyorkin is also a Soviet citizen who along with everyone else was educated in the socialist spirit during the years of Soviet power.

The concept of "one's own land" had for a long time been associated in the peasant's mind with his own minute plot of land. It was namely of such a plot that Nikita Morgunok dreamed in Tvardovsky's poem *Land of Muravia* written five years before the war:

The plot throughout its length and breadth
Is all your own,
Though all you plant's a penny worth,
It's yours alone...

(Translated by Dorian Rottenberg)

And here the peasant's usual idea of things has undergone a profound change:

Vast and boundless is our homeland,
And no matter where you stray,
It is yours, it is your own land,
You belong there anyway.

(Translated by Alex Miller)

Tyorkin, a soldier in the war of liberation, has a feeling for his country, its history, the Soviet land and its people. However, as a rule, this feeling does not require high-falutin words and avoids accentuated expression. There is no point talking about it when the task at hand is perfectly clear: they must stand their ground and beat their mortal enemy.

Tyorkin snores. There's no more to it.
He just takes things as they come.

I belong, and well I know it.
Russia needs me. Here I am!..

If we play it cool and stick it,
We'll come out of this alive,
We'll be back again. We'll make it.
Wait, our moment will arrive.

(Translated by Alex Miller)

There is an experiment you might remember from your school-days for discovering the nature of magnetism. If you put a strong magnet under a sheet of cardboard, the metal scraps scattered over it will suddenly arrange themselves in lines of force and form a clear pattern. Each tiny bit of metal is now a magnet with its own field.

It seems to me that there is something similar to this in the epic situation caused by the Great Patriotic War. And it was possible to make an epic hero of a rank-and-file soldier, a tiny part of the people, because this tiny part during the war basically possessed the same qualities and characteristics as the people as a whole. Tyorkin does not simply participate in the war like a cog in a vast military machine. He also wages his own private war against fascism and in this he does not need orders or encouragement. All this is clearly evident in Tyorkin's hard single-handed fight against a hardened nazi.

Like some ancient scene of combat,
Breast to breast like shield to shield,
Setting the fate of thousands,
Drawn up on the battlefield.

Tyorkin fought with chest and body,
Held his front and stood his ground...

(Translated by Alex Miller)

Tvardovsky's epic poem also brings to mind the folk epic of the distant past, though it is by no means merely a return to the past. *Vasili Tyorkin,* like many other epic works of the war years, is an innovatory phenomenon in socialist culture,

synthesising the experience and achievements of world artistic development.

When describing the character of literature at each of its new stages, it is important to look at the relations between its lyrical and epic quality. It is well known that these relations are mobile and changeable. The epic state of the world sees many more epic works and less lyrical ones. However, we would be wrong to think simply in terms of quantity. In any case, during the Great Patriotic War, this general regularity manifested itself in an unusual manner: epic poetry became deeply permeated with lyricism while lyrical poetry acquired epic qualities. The result of these two seemingly "incompatible" genres joining together was a new genre designated by some Soviet researches as the "lyrical epos".

Lyrical digressions are rarely found in war poems as they are intricately woven into the text. The distance between the author and his hero is minimum. Again, Tvardovsky's poem is typical in this respect. For the poet, Tyorkin is a comrade-in-arms, friend and fellow countryman whose thoughts, feelings and aspirations are to all extents and purposes identical to his own. That is why the "objective" epic depiction and the author's profound lyricism blend so well in the work and are continually changing places. As Tvardovsky said himself: "In my relations as a poet with my reader, a Soviet man at war, *Tyorkin* was (at once) my lyrics, my journalism, my song and precept, an anecdote and tale, a heart-to-heart talk and a timely rejoinder."[47]

Of course, every writer combined these elements in his own distinct manner but what we have here is a general widespread phenomenon. *The Unsubdued, Rainbow, The Taking of Velikoshumsk* and *The Young Guard* were all "lyrics and journalism" for their authors, not to mention the poems *Zoya* by Margarita Aligher, *Son* by Pavel Antokolsky, *Pulkovo Meridian* by Vera Inber and *Russia* by Alexander Prokofiev, to name but a few.

The powerful "magnetic field" of the epic situation brought about a considerable change in the structure of the genre, content and style of Soviet poetry. The long poem in all its

diversity came to the fore in poetry: the lyrical poem, the ode, the folk tale in verse, and the epos. Poetry's penchant for a developed plot and narrative revived the old genre of the ballad. The new epic content of poetry demanded a similar transformation in its devices, means and style.

The war with its mortal threat to entire nations and separate individuals intensified all human feelings for life, nature, love and friendship. It made us discover things anew, and reexamine the familiar concepts of our motherland, socialist country and nationality. Poetry found great inspiration in discovering the links between the past and future, man and the people, the living and the dead.

Lyrical war poetry, of course, remained essentially lyrical, expressing human emotions in poetic language. However, these emotions acquired a special universal nature and arose in conditions when the gap between things personal and things universal became increasingly narrower. Of this Olga Bergholtz writes:

I value more than any glory
that at the price of my terrible winter,
I have the fortune and the right
to put "I" in verse when I mean "we" .

So inseparable were the fates of the poet and the people at this time of great suffering that a very unique opportunity presented itself to express the feelings of one and all in a single poem or song. Among their number were Lebedev-Kumach's "Holy War", Simonov's "Kill Him", and "Wait for Me", Surkov's "Restless Flames Twist and Toss in the Stove", and Isakovsky's "In a Front-Line Forest" and "Little Lamp". This lyrical poetry graphically expressed the pain, faith, hope, anger and determination of the entire people at war, thereby winning the right to be called the "lyrics of millions".

"Never before has the Soviet writer had such a reader as now,"[48] wrote Nikolai Tikhonov at the time. The war certainly did create a reader who had a desperate need for literature and who, in the words of Olga Bergholtz, not simply read poetry but lived by it.

The reverse is equally true: never before did the Soviet

reader have such a writer as during the war, a writer who was a true friend and comrade-in-arms and knew no greater joy or reward than doing as much as possible for the common cause. Soviet literature, as Alexei Tolstoy put it, "went into the trenches and factories" and became "the living voice of the people at war attaining an almost folkloric quality".[49]

The usual temporal space between the historical events and their literary reflection disappeared. The epic situation caused by the war was this time not simply an object for depiction as was the case, for example, with the Patriotic War of 1812 in 19th-century literature. Writers worked from "within" this situation, taking part in it and living through it together with millions of their fellow countrymen. However, this did not prevent Soviet writers from creating works which were to rank among the best in world literature.

5. "ON THE SHOULDERS OF THE GREAT SOCIAL MOVEMENT..."

I hope that the first four sections of this chapter have given the reader some idea of the major landmarks in the formation of Soviet literature. I shall now attempt to show the particular features of the interaction between literature and reality applying to the entire epoch in which socialism was established in the Soviet Union.

Undoubtedly, a distinguishing feature of this epoch is the unusually *stormy and swift character of socio-historical development.* History was, as it were, confirming the relativity of time, which was discovered at that period, accelerating its pace and filling the shortest spans of time with processes of tremendous social significance. In retrospect the first half of the twentieth century in our country's history now seems like a mountainous region raised by unprecedented pressure with the social upsurges looming like a series of peaks above it:

The heroic assault on the old world in 1905.

The social advance of 1912-1914—a prelude to revolutionary events.

World War I, which awakened the country and revealed all its contradictions.

The year 1917, which presented itself to the world "crowned with the thorns of revolt" (Mayakovsky).

The violent Civil War which split the country.

The sharp change in the life of the peasantry who made up the majority of the population.

The powerful upsurge of socialist construction during the first five-year plans.

The years of the Great Patriotic War with its unprecedented suffering and unparalleled greatness of spirit.

At another time events of such a scale would have taken several centuries. Now, they were confined to the conscious life of one generation. *Social transformations of an unprecedented depth*—this is how one may describe the second feature of this epoch, which is closely linked to the first.

"Everything has been turned upside down and only now is being put right," we read in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. He was speaking of Russia after the abolishment of serfdom. Everything was to a far greater extent "turned upside down" during the socialist revolution. All the "tables of ranks", on which the social hierarchy of the Russian Empire was based, were reduced to ashes. The "bonds of law and order" (Hegel) regulating human activity fell to pieces. New production relations and other social ties were taking shape, and new socialist norms and institutes were created and put to the severe test of history. After the most radical social upheaval in history this readjustment of human relations was bound to be hard and take time. In fact, it took several decades.

The country's development in the first half of the century was not merely stormy and swift. It took place under *maximum tension* when the fate of the revolution and the socialist state and even the people's very existence were at stake and when all efforts at each stage were concentrated on the solution of one impossibly difficult task at a time:

Overthrowing tsarism.

Accomplishing the socialist revolution.

Defending Soviet power in the struggle against innumerable enemies at home and abroad.

Overcoming famine and rebuilding the devastated country.

Turning it into a developed industrial state.

Defeating fascism.

Reconstructing the economy which had been destroyed by the war.

A goal which could be described in a couple of words became the meaning of life for the entire people and for each separate individual. The situation encapsulated in the expressive formula "who will win?" lasted not just a month or a year but throughout the era.

A sharp increase in the social activity of the masses was an integral part of the social development at this time. The acceleration of the historical process was explained in the final count by the fact that tens of millions of people were directly involved in the solution of gigantic social tasks. All previous formations were followed, when they were just taking shape, by an increase in the people's social activity and an expansion in its scope. The socialist revolution, which was accomplished by the working people and in their interests, was unequalled in this respest.

Naturally, these are by no means the only distinctive features of the epoch which Leonid Leonov at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 called the morning of a new era. I have enumerated, of course, its most important cardinal features. A living "plasma" of social emotions, which had a direct bearing on the development of art, was formed on the basis of these objective conditions.

The state of social consciousness is reflected in the works of literature and art, in the artists' perception of their tasks and in the way they interpret immediate reality. The sphere of art has a great advantage in this respect because it alone may preserve to the minutest detail and with a fair degree of accuracy the complex world of social emotions for future generations. That is why the task of studying the state of social consciousness, and the particular features of the social psychology of a given period often involves the reverse process of reconstructing the social emotions as they are reflected in various forms of art.

The colours in which man sees the world are determined ultimately by the objective, real relations between man and the world prevailing at a given time. The characteristic feature of the world outlook of an alienated individual lost in a desert without light and shade and deprived of any social guidance, is hopelessness. The world perception of an individual limited in his activity by immediate circumstances, is characterised by a vast range of conflicting colours. A hopeful and cheerful temperament and an optimistic world outlook is part and parcel of "creative" man who is the subject of historical action.

Social optimism is a natural part of a socialist society in the initial stages of its great history. However, this does not mean that its manifestations are always the same. The unique quality of the social optimism in the transitional period between capitalism and socialism was, first and foremost, in the novelty of this feeling, its freshness and intensity. And such intensity was only possible at a time when everything was undergoing radical change.

We have already mentioned that the famous symbol of faith of the Renaissance, "Man can do all!", gained a new lease of life at that time. It embodied, among other things, a notion of the surrounding world being "pliant", and showed the greatest confidence in man's ability to reconstruct, renew, and completely re-create of his own free will literally everything in the world about him, including himself, his daily round, ethics, economy and art. Many writers expressed this idea in their own way. For Leonov new man was "the great planner and future designer of our planet".[50] "...We are rejecting passive uninvolvement in history," declared Alexei Tolstoy. "We are penetrating into history, into the depths of nature, of the classes, and slumbering human souls..."[51] Gorky formulated the task at hand thus: "We have got to destroy everything that was in the shortest time possible and create entirely new conditions of life, such as may be found nowhere else."[52]

The sense of man's omnipotence was essentially determined by a real, visible process consisting in the rapid revolutionary reconstruction of the world. However, social consciousness is not mechanically shaped from objective socio-historical processes: it has a momentum and relative independence of its

own. The sharp increase in man's ability to change things was also reflected in those of his ideas which went even further than these real abilities. An intricate socio-psychological phenomenon developed with various repercussions. These convictions, moods and feelings had a powerful and beneficial effect on society, helping it to overcome incredible difficulties and undertake to solve what seemed like insoluble problems and tasks. These emotions, however, carried the seeds of a social phenomenon known as voluntarism, whose full danger could only be appreciated much later.

Both in the epoch of the country's socialist transformation and nowadays, the formation of social consciousness was and still is greatly influenced by the main social conflict of the twentieth century: the struggle between the two social systems. During the first decades after the revolution this conflict was undoubtedly strongly reflected in the structure and state of social consciousness. It was then that the first fissure appeared in the world capitalist system. The Soviet Union opposed world capitalism all alone and for many years found itself in a state of siege as it defended its right to exist. This explained why social consciousness suddenly became much more political in orientation: current events were viewed strictly from a political and class viewpoint.

Finally, there is one more aspect of social consciousness at that time which is inseparable from all the others. It was graphically expressed in the novel *On the Other Side,* in which Victor Kin assessed his hero's world outlook thus: "The world was simple for Bezais."

Man's perception of the *world's simplicity* does not necessarily point to his immaturity or narrow-mindedness. The world really does become simple when one can clearly distinguish between one's friends and enemies, pinpoint one's goal in life, perceive one's social bonds and totally devote oneself to the solution of some great historical mission. In this sense the world is simple not only for young Bezais but also for Pavel Korchagin in Nikolai Ostrovsky's novel *How the Steel Was Tempered,* Margulies in Katayev's *Onwards, Time!,* Vasili Tyorkin and the members of the underground organisation in *The Young Guard.* The world's simplicity, wonderful as it may be, is far from always possible.

Here we have a list of the objective specific features of the epoch in which socialism was established. Here, too, are a few ideas on the way in which these features were reflected in social consciousness.

It is now easier for us to imagine the socio-historical sources of the processes which occurred during the revolution in the sphere of culture. So let's turn to this aspect which interests us most.

"True art," wrote young Richard Wagner in 1849, "may be raised from its state of civilised barbarism to a height worthy of it only on the shoulders of a great social movement; they have a common goal and can attain it only on the condition that they both recognise it. This goal is *beautiful* and *strong* man; let the *Revolution* give him *Strength,* let *Art* give him *Beauty.*"[53]

Many years later another eminent artist by the name of Alexander Blok reflected on the fate of art in the following manner. In an article on the fall of humanism in the 19th century he wrote that civilisation "deprived of its wings and resonance", and based on individualism, ceases to be the bearer of the spirit of culture. The custodians of this spirit ("the spirit of music") are now those very masses who have previously been excluded from the humanist movement. "And, finally, I may affirm," declared Blok, "that the outcome of the battle is predetermined and that the movement of the humanitarian civilisation has been replaced by a new movement, which has also been born of the spirit of music; this movement represents a stormy torrent, which is carrying away the last scraps of old civilisation; in it, however, the personality is being allotted a new role and a new type of man can already be discerned. . ."[54]

Civilisation "deprived of its wings and resonance" really did cause a most profound crisis in world culture, reducing art to the lowest form of "civilised barbarism"—the morbid vagaries of the decadent movements. And it was not divine Providence that led art out of this impasse at the turn of the twentieth century. It was raised to a height worthy of it *on the shoulders of a great social movement* which enveloped entire continents. The innovatory essence of socialist culture is the ideological and aesthetical equivalent and result of everything new that the October

Socialist Revolution brought into the world. This assertion by no means underestimates the role of artistic talent. We are merely stating the indisputable priority of the revolutionary epoch to which many popular talents owe their birth and advancement.

The ties of socialist art with the foregoing development of humanity's culture are complex and manifold. They include one aspect which may be best expressed by the concept of a given social phenomenon's return, as it were, on a higher plane of its development to a lower one.

The concept of the "negation of the negation" was put forward and argued in philosophical terms by Hegel. In their study of social processes Marx and Engels repeatedly came across what looked like reversions to an initial stage of development. Lenin also asserted that one of the major natural laws governing development was "the repetition at a higher stage of certain features, properties, etc., of the lower one and the apparent return to the old (negation of the negation)". All nature, all social development has proved to humankind "not merely the idea of motion but motion precisely with a return to the point of departure, i.e., dialectical motion."[56]

Such an "apparent return to the old" (and namely to epic artistic consciousness) came about during the era of the establishment of socialism. And it, of course, did not come about as a result of an abstract dialectic "triad" (Hegel's theory of three-phase development) but under the powerful influence of "a great social movement" which re-created at a higher stage the initial integrity of the personality and active constructive relations between man and reality.

What time (or times) does one have in mind when speaking of a return to the past? On the one hand, a return to certain aspects of the culture of humanity's pre-capitalist "infancy"—the art of antiquity and the oral folk tradition. On the other hand, there is bound to be some typological similarity between socialist art and the art reflecting the initial stage of capitalism. And this is namely the art of the Renaissance and, considerably later, the literature of the Enlightenment.

The formation of capitalism took several centuries and corresponded in different countries to various stages of general

cultural development. However, on the whole the periods of more intense social activity which were associated with the emergence of the capitalist system, were characterised by an optimistic world outlook, an increased awareness of the personality, faith in man's reason and creative powers, and an affirmation of the precedence of duty over feelings, and of social interests over personal ones. This world outlook again acquired a historical foothold in the epoch of the formation of socialism and greatly influenced artistic expression.

Profound qualitative changes took place in *the extent to which literature and art was national in character and available to the people.*

Let us listen to what the well-known Soviet literary historian and theoretician, Academician Dmitry Likhachev, has to say on this score: "The development of literature, even when it is very slow," he noted in an article entitled "The Distinctive Features of the Development of Russian Literature in the 10th-17th Centuries", "never occurs evenly. Literature advances in leaps and bounds and the latter are always linked to an expansion in its sphere of activity. The first such notable expansion took place back in the 15th century with the introduction into writing of a cheaper material than parchment, that is, of paper, and with it came mass forms of written works, anthologies, intended for a wide reading public...

"In the 17th century literature became still more accessible with the appearance of works of a democratic nature... They were written in a careless or business-like cursive hand, seldom bound rightaway, appearing in notebooks and circulated among poorer readers. This was the second 'leap' in the mass character of literature. The third occurred in the 18th century when literature was first put on a printing press and journalism developed with all its new European genres."[58]

The logic of these reflections invites me to continue by saying, the fourth qualitative leap in the national character of Russian literature occurred in the 19th century and was linked to a decisive democratisation of the language and content of literature, to the name of Pushkin and the so-called "natural school". And, finally, the fifth leap in the mass character of literature came in the 20th century as a result of the October

Revolution. In its consequence it surpassed all the other advances by far. "Within the lifetime of a single generation," said Leonid Brezhnev in one of his speeches, "the Soviet land liberated itself completely and for ever from the onerous burden of illiteracy. The working people began to take an active part in cultural life; they became the creators of cultural values. A new, socialist intelligentsia has emerged from the midst of the people... A union which the best minds in history had dreamed of, the historic union of labour and culture, has taken place. In the history of our country, in the history of world culture, this marks an event of tremendous significance."[57]

During the epoch in which socialism was formed *the writer's position changed* radically. In antiquity the artist had not yet detached himself from society and still looked at the world through its eyes, acting as if on its authority. Later a distinct and at times very sharp line divided the artist from society. Art's viewpoint was now the viewpoint of the individual and a work of literature began to be perceived both by its author and by readers as an individual conception of the world. It appeared, however, that the organic unity between the artist and the people lay not only in the past but also in the future.

In the emotional atmosphere of the first years after the revolution writers longed so much to fuse with the masses that some books were published without the author's name on the cover. Of course, such experiments were bound to be shortlived. It was impossible to return to the times when epic poems were composed anonymously. The unity between Soviet writers and the Soviet people was not gained by levelling the creative individuality. On the contrary, it developed and brought out in full the originality of literary talent.

Life gave the realist artists of the past the role of observer, critic and judge of the far from ideal reality. During the great social upheaval the artist found himself in another position, that of a participant in the historical events, with his share of the responsibility for the common cause. Such a change, of course, not only manifested itself in the artist's direct social activity but also left its hallmark on all aspects of art's form and content.

The epic orientation of artistic consciousness was seen, first and foremost, in the changed relations between character and circumstances.

The epic of the remote past, as a rule, narrated events covering the entire macrocosm of a given society and proving crucial to the fate of its people. The realist art of the 19th century, on the contrary, was limited more often than not to a depiction of a narrow slice of reality which came within the individual's field of vision. History was, as it were, dissolved in daily life and began to affect each separate individual only through a long chain of mediate links. During the socialist remaking of society the wind of history once again swept through literary works. Breaking the conventions of the family drama with its peripeteia of the individual's life, history, as it were, itself began to construct subject-matter, invent plots and the outcome of conflicts, tying together the lives of the most varied characters with invisible threads. "The backbone of law-governed phenomena" (Alexei Tolstoy), which were revealed to the artist, enabled him to elucidate reality from a single viewpoint, gather a vast amount of material drawn from life and penetrate into the seeming chaos of the world, and into the kaleidoscope of events, past and present.

A long way had been covered from the epic hero of antiquity and monumental, many-faceted characters of the Renaissance to the "private" and then "alienated" individual. What's more, there were many who asserted this way could not be retraced. Literature, however, disproved these assertions when a new social figure—creative man—entered the historic stage.

The "hero with an ideal" of the era of the country's socialist transformation has all the attributes of the epic hero who had occupied, as we have seen, a special place in Hegel's aesthetics. He is an "independent, strong and integral heroic character", who is very sure of his way in life. Of course, he is bound to definite circumstances, and interacts with them but these are circumstances that belong to the vast current of history, with which he is also moving. He is by no means incapable of deep feeling but what is most important about this hero (as well as about the method of his depiction) is the dialectics of

his action and not the dialectics of his soul. His actions are always determined by his own conviction of the rightness of his cause, his own understanding of justice and his deep cravings, and not by some exterior circumstances influencing him. The goal he is fighting for is vast: to build and defend the new, truly humane social system. However, this goal is so concrete and so much part of the fate of man that he often has to choose between life and death to prove his loyalty to it.

The specific typological features of literature are in many ways tied to one or another historically established method of affirming the aesthetic ideal. Here, too, we see a return, as it were, to the past, which has taken place with the epic reorientation of artistic consciousness.

In the past all epic art had at its disposal was the means of directly depicting and affirming what it considered lofty, beautiful and vital for man and mankind. Modern art was able to aesthetically assimilate all the phenomena of reality, without exception, and make them the object of artistic reflection only after it had found ways of *indirectly* affirming the ideal, that is, by contrasting true and possible reality. The innovatory nature of Soviet classical fiction was largely due to the fact that it was again given the opportunity to affirm the ideal *directly*. The writer perceived beauty in man's growing stature, in his contact with matters and events of a universal significance and in the individual's creative influence on the world about him. He affirmed this ideal with all the means at his disposal, some of which he borrowed from the artistic store of the past and now gave them a new lease of life...

One last question still needs examining in this chapter, namely, the way in which the changes, which took place in literature, were comprehended by literary critics and writers, or, what basically comes to the same thing, the meaning invested in the concept of socialist realism when it had only just emerged.

Only ignorant or biased people can assert that socialist realism was foisted on writers and artists from without. First of all, there was the work and the actual creative pursuits of multinational Soviet art which urgently needed a theoretical in-

terpretation. Then there was the term explaining the new phenomenon, the theory in development.

The articles, reports and speeches written by Gorky in the first half of the 30s were particularly important in working out the theory of socialist realism. In as far as his opinions have been purposely misinterpreted more than once, I shall cite them as fully as possible here.

"Reality is monumental," wrote Gorky, "for a long time now it has been worthy of broad canvases and sweepingly generalised images. . ."[58] ". . .Can the contemporary writer with the technique and devices he possesses make these generalisations and these syntheses? Ought we not look for a way of joining realism and romanticism into something capable of expressing the heroic present in brighter colours and of speaking of it in a loftier and more appropriate tone?"[59]

"Even first-rate writers with sufficient experience lack the power of making a sweeping generalisation, a synthesis of reality seething with amazing human energy which works wonders. . . You need to try along these lines. You need to learn to form syntheses, and not just produce bits and pieces. A vast generalisation, large canvases that's what we want."[60]

"The proletarian literature of all the peoples of the Union of Socialist Soviets is setting itself the extremely difficult task of creating epic art with the devices of realism. . ."[61] "When the means and devices of realism prevent you from depicting the hero of the epoch in the light he deserves, look for others and work them out."[62] ". . .In order to describe this hero with due force and in an idiomatic style, you have to learn to write plays from the old peerless masters of this literary form and most of all from Shakespeare."[63]

"To bring out clearly the unbearable, vile abomination of the past, it is essential that we master the skill of looking at it from the height of today's achievements and from the height of tomorrow's great goals. This point of departure must and surely will be a source of great, joyful inspiration which will, in turn, give our literature a new tone and help it to create new forms. It will eventually develop the new trend we need so badly, that of socialist realism, which, it goes without saying, may be developed only on the basis of socialist experience."[64]

"...I realise that I am now writing in the same blissful mood, which at the birth of culture enabled people to create immortal poems and legends..."[65]

"Socialist realism asserts that the very meaning of life lies in purposeful creative activity, whose aim is to constantly develop man's most precious individual talents in the name of his victory over the forces of nature, his health and longevity, in the name of the great happiness to be alive on earth which he, in compliance with his ever-increasing needs, wishes to make into the wonderful dwelling of humanity united into one family."[66]

The opinions of other Soviet writers are also important for an understanding of the essence of socialist realism.

The new qualities of life affecting all aspects of artistic activity caused writers to feel deeply dissastisfied with traditional literary forms. "With what words," asked Alexander Fadeyev, "can one express in art ... the unprecedented changes in life, in the daily round and in people's consciousness?"[67] According to Alexei Tolstoy, the shortcomings of Soviet literature were themselves in many ways explained by the fact that "the whole past experience of literature gave us hardly any artistic experience, traditions and style to depict the optimistic life-affirming force which has entered life in order to transform it".[68] "I realised," said Bruno Yasensky from the rostrum of the First All-Union Writers' Congress, "that a truthful portrayal of our new reality cannot be gained from any one of our existing literary genres, that all our literary forms come to nothing as soon as they touch upon reality."[69] Leonid Leonov explained the decline of small forms in literature and intensive development of the novel by the difficulties writers encountered while depicting rapidly changing reality. "It's just as hard as tracing the contours of a shadow cast by a raincloud on a huge meadow. It is sweeping along much faster than teh slowly plodding art... You can either photograph the swift shadow of gigantic things and their creators ... or try in more monumental genres to find an emotional formula explaining how these heavy clouds full of rain and goodness for the earth are being formed."[70]

How can one overcome these difficulties? How can one attain a fuller and more exact artistic depiction of the new social-

ist way of life and rapidly changing reality? Turning this over in their minds, the participants of the First Writers' Congress focused their attention mostly on the traditions of monumental epic art.

Samuel Marshak considered their most important task was to "create a new epos".[71] Fadeyev said: "We have yet to discover new monumental forms in which this revolutionary dream of working humanity could be cast." Socialist realism "does not necessarily have to repeat or copy reality and details of everyday life... It presupposes, in my opinion, employing more synthetic forms than those most of us use."[72] At an even earlier date Alexei Tolstoy had spoken against the "fear of the grandiose" and in favour of the "heroic novel" and the inspired literature of "monumental realism". "Its task is the creation of man. Its method is to create a typified character. Its creed is man's greatness. Its course is to head directly towards the highest goal, that of creating with passion and tremendous tension the type of a great man... We must not be afraid of sweeping gestures and grand-sounding words."[73]

Ferdinand Lassalle once asked Marx and Engels to have a look at his play *Franz von Sickingen*. He received replies from both which, though written independently, were very similar in tone and content. Calling on the author to keep more rigidly to the truth of the time and logic of the characters, Marx noted, "you would then have been automatically compelled to write more in *Shakespeare's* manner whereas I regard as your gravest shortcoming the fact that à la *Schiller*, you transform individuals into mere mouthpieces of the spirit of the time".[74] Engels spotted the same flaw in the play: "A complete fusion of profound ideas and historical content ... with the Shakespearian vitality and wealth of action will probably only be attained in the future and possibly not by Germans."[75]

If we were to attempt to sum up in a few words the creative aspirations of Soviet writers, which were particularly apparent at the beginning of the 30s, we could say that they were *to follow the Shakespearian tradition* as closely as possible. Writers were not satisfied with the experience of 19th-century realism with its elaborate means of depicting "created" man, the victim of inhumane circumstances and a stagnant milieu. Passing over the

19th-century Russian and foreign classics, they turned to the experience of the ancient tragedians, to the oral folk epos, and to the works of Shakespeare. The fusion of profound ideas and historical content with the Shakespearian vitality and wealth of action was what they saw as the ideal of new socialist art.

Can one say that the epic tendency in the literature of the 1920s-40s was the most important and that it, more than any other, embodied the writers' creative aspirations and fulfilled the expectations of the reading public? Yes. It is another matter that this tendency was not the only one in all the diversity of Soviet literature. Quite a few works, not of an epic character but still forming an integral part of the new culture, were published.

With their own insight and creative worlds, writers such as Mikhail Zoshchenko, Mikhail Bulgakov, Andrei Bely, Andrei Platonov and Boris Pilnyak wrote brilliant works of fiction. A unique contribution to Soviet poetry was made by Anna Akhmatova, Boris Pasternak, Osip Mandelstam, Sergei Yesenin and many other lyrical poets.

The so-called "unorthodox" Soviet writers of the 1920s-40s are much better known in the West. A great deal has been written and still is about the hardships or adversities which befell various writers, including some of the ones mentioned here. What can one say about this?

It is easy to be wise after the event. Going over the past, we always find better, more sensible ways in which we could have acted. The same refers to the country's history where much could also have been done differently. But history, like the life of each of us, is irreversible. All we can do is regret certain things and learn lessons from the past for future reference. And we have one other duty to the past, which is to judge all the complex social phenomena that then came to pass as accurately and objectively as possible.

Who would now think of justifying the things that prevented certain talented people, honestly seeking their way in life, from living and working normally? Still, it would be wrong to put all the blame on the calumny of critics and bans imposed by administrators. It was a difficult and complex time and not everything in it can be explained by the logic of another age. Consi-

derable problems arose for a number of talented writers in the 20s and 30s because they failed, as it were, to keep "abreast of the time". And the people who evaluated their works were sometimes insufficiently far-sighted, broad-minded or even cultured. However, not only the lifting of unwarranted bans can explain the fact that Bulgakov's and Akhmatova's works are now published in editions of tens and hundreds of thousands. To a considerable extent, the reason for this is that the conditions of life have changed and readers' interests have become much more varied, as have the genres and forms of the literature satisfying these interests.

It remains an indisputable fact that literary research had the practical task of outlining and charting the new elements which had entered literature and art, and of defining the distinctions between 19th-century realism (understood as the art of "created" man) and the realism of a new type (the art of "creative" man). Gorky's term—critical realism—at once became current to denote the realism of the past century. However, it took longer to find a definition for the art born of the revolution. Literary criticism of the time referred to it as "tendentious", "social", "monumental", "socialist" and "heroic"... And to one extent or another all these adjectives conveyed certain features of the new art.

What then did the concept of "socialist realism" exactly mean during Soviet literature's first stage of development? The above-cited opinions of Gorky and other writers leave no doubt as far as this is concerned. Socialist realism meant an *epic art which had been lifted "on the shoulders of a great social movement"*.

For the participants of the First Writers' Congress the definition "socialist realism" had not only ideological but also typological connotations. It referred to a literature which enjoyed a new relationship with its readers and the reality, a literature actively involved in the process of the revolutionary reshaping of the world. It referred to the epos of the people's life which had been created by emissaries of that same people and reflected its feelings and aspirations at a sharp turning-point in history. It represented a special kind of interaction between character and circumstances: a depiction of man who had active and creatively transforming relations with the world, the "hero with an ideal"

devoted to the cause of bringing life in accord with his convictions. It comprised books, plays and films throughout which, from beginning to end, both the heroes and the socio-historical conditions of their milieu were in a constant state of flux.

All these vital points were reflected in the Charter passed by the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. Here is an excerpt from its introduction: "The literary movement's direct and close contact with topical issues of Party and Soviet government policies, the writers' active participation in socialist construction and their thorough and extensive study of reality, all this is of vital importance for literature's growth, artistic craftsmanship, ideological and political import and practical effectiveness." Further on it noted that the results of critically assimilating the literary heritage and generalising on the experience of socialist culture were expressed in the principles of socialist realism. Then came the well-known formula: "As the chief method of Soviet literature and criticism, socialist realism requires of the artist a truthful, historical and concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. Moreover, the truthfulness, historical and concrete essence of the artistic depiction of reality must be combined with the task of re-making and educating the working people in the spirit of socialism."[76]

I repeat, by no means did all Soviet literature of that period answer these criteria. However, it was the epic works which stood in the foreground of literature and determined the main tendency of its development. It was these works which reflected the innovatory essence of Soviet literature and its contribution to world culture.

This literature managed to cope brilliantly with the most complex innovatory tasks which came its way, "imprint the birth of an unheard-of world" (Leonov), and "write the history of a new man in a new milieu" (Alexei Tolstoy). In order to accomplish this, it made use of "more synthetic forms" (Fadeyev) than 19th-century literature did because they appeared to suit the changed relations between man and history. It brought into world culture "new ideas, new relations, new feelings and a new solution to the problems troubling mankind" (Kirshon).

Soviet classics consist of works of strongly pronounced epic realism. It depicts the momentum of life in society's swift devel-

opment from capitalism to socialism, and in the stormy process of the masses' history-making creative activity. It professes reality as the practical incarnation of the aesthetic ideal. The hero who in his struggle for communism has gained unprecedented strength and integrity of character, and relations which enable him to really influence the outer world, are represented in literature as a true man and true relations which are very much part of the ideal of beauty. This literature describes the upheaval which occurred in the world as a whole, and in states, classes, families and individuals. It is a literature of great historical optimism and elevated romantic fervour born of the unprecedented upsurge in the struggle for social liberation, the acceleration of social progress, and the buoyant world outlook of man who felt he was "history's instructor" (Anatoli Lunacharsky).

And it is not enough to say that this literature marked one of the highest peaks in world culture at the time. The powerful revolutionary spirit of the age enabled it to see far ahead, and attain such perfection and clarity of purpose in revealing the people's constructive historical activity, which, perhaps, anticipated many of the features of art in the communist society of the future.

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Chapter Three
IN MID-CENTURY

1. FROM ONE STAGE TO THE NEXT

After gaining a victory over German fascism and managing in a short time to restore the war-ravaged economy, the Soviet Union did not simply enter a new phase in its development. The 1950s, the mid-century, marked the transition from one epoch in the country's history to another. Thus ended the epoch of the formation of a new social system, the building of socialism, which took place in conditions of an acute struggle inside the country and armed attacks from outside. And thus began an epoch of mature socialism when the new formation developed on its own basis, and there emerged the community of socialist countries, along with the growing competition, rivalry and struggle between the two social systems in the international arena.

These two epochs in which socialism developed in the Soviet Union are marked by a very high degree of continuity. However, they also represent two different states of social life and differ greatly in many ways. I shall now explain some of the most important differences.

During the first three decades of its existence the Soviet Union had to strain all its forces to the limit in order to repulse its internal and foreign enemies and ensure that the country's economic and cultural backwardness was overcome as quickly as possible. In the 60s-80s the complex problems and tasks facing the country did not, of course, diminish but it was given the chance to live a normal, peaceful life and meet the people's immeasurably higher material and cultural demands.

Now that its "long birth pangs" (Marx) were in the past, the new formation became firmly established once and for all, and reached full maturity. And it is quite natural that the age of

stormy change and radical transformation of all the social foundations was succeeded by an age marked by their relative stability, when they were gradually perfected in the course of the country's development. At the same time, man, setting out in life, now had to deal with a relatively "ready-made" world, a complex system of existing institutions, production and other social relations, and with objective circumstances of various kinds which were considerably less "pliant" than before. "Creative" man certainly did not leave the social scene but many aspects of his interaction with the world acquired a new character.

In the epoch of the formation of socialism society developed fighting the forces and traditions of the old world, and had to overcome irreconcilable class contradictions. The extreme conditions dictated the extreme means of achieving the ends, which were frequently decided upon by sheer force of will, against all the odds, and quite often without any regard for the cost. Things are different in conditions of mature socialism. Natural laws governing the development of a socialist society were established and came into effect, and in the course of this development there emerge certain contradictions and problems. In order to progress successfully, we have to know these natural laws and discern the emerging contradictions in good time. All the pressing problems have to be solved in the most rational and effective manner in accordance with the economic and social laws of socialism.

If we revert to the Hegelian terminology, which we are already acquainted with, we might say that after the war a transition took place in the Soviet Union (of which society was aware) from a "heroic" state "which had yet to develop into a firmly established order", to an "established" and in this sense "prosaic" state. Naturally, this was not a literal repetition of what history had known previously. What we mean here is "the apparent return to the old", dialectical motion in the course of which certain "repetitions" taking place under different socio-historical conditions are bound to occur.

The transition from the epoch when the new formation was being established to that of the development of socialism on its own basis could not proceed quickly and smoothly like, say, the traffic speeding along a modern motorway. Some of the natural

laws governing social progress became outdated while others took their place. The conditions of life of society as a whole and of each separate individual were changing. There was a complex and, in its way, dramatic reorientation of social consciousness, during which old-fashioned notions, views and habits were rejected and replaced by new ones.

"We have brought socialism into everyday life and must here see how matters stand,"[1] declared Lenin in his last public speech in November 1922. What he then had in mind was the transition from the Civil War to peaceful construction and from the conditions of War Communism to the New Economic Policy. The task of seeing "how matters stand" again became of paramount importance after the Second World War when the country started a new historical epoch. Soviet society then experienced a pressing need to learn more about itself in all areas of life and to make a profound study of the new natural laws underlying its progress. It is namely this which explains the vast significance of the reorientation of social consciousness which took place in the 50s. It pointed to our people's new level of understanding of the economically and socially determined character of vital phenomena in the life of Soviet society and a new degree of spiritual maturity.

A social process of such a nature and scope could not but affect artistic creativity. Indeed, it exerted immense influence on the development of literature and was reflected in it in the most diverse manner. For its part, literature proved to be one of the main factors stimulating the advance of social thought. The best books of the 50s, which won wide acclaim, did away with all the simplified, sketchy notions of life, gave food for thought and helped the reader find the most effective ways of solving urgent social problems.

2. THE ANATOMY OF THE "INDUSTRIAL" NOVEL

I am not writing an advertisement brochure on the history of Soviet literature. What I intend is to study its inner movement which is inseparably tied to the movement of society itself. And

as far as I am concerned, my task is to comprehend and explain not only why, say, Sholokhov could write such a great book as *And Quiet Flows the Don* but also why in certain years Soviet literature produced no remarkable works at all.

Such a decline in creative activity or, rather, in the results of Soviet writers' efforts, occurred in the late 40s and early 50s. During these seven or eight years the main works to stand the test of time were historical novels, documentary books and fiction about the war which had recently ended. It is obvious today that the reality of that time stubbornly resisted the writers' attempts to present it in a literary form.

The so-called "industrial" novel was foremost in literature at that period. Following the example of epics of first socialist construction projects and monumental works about the drastic changes in village life, which had been so successful before the war, writers chose construction sites, collective farms and factory shops as the settings of their works. Why did this type of novel fail to make the grade as its forerunners had done, and end up instead mostly as reading material for literary historians?

Here is a short list of the works of this type which appeared at the time: Olga Ziv's *A Busy Time*, Vadim Ocheretin's *First Daring*, Alexander Bylinov's *Metal-workers*, and Yevgeni Vorobyev's *The Height*. These novels were not only conceived at one and the same time but also followed similar creative principles. All three of them even had the same setting: a unique all-welded blast-furnace. *A Busy Time* is about the elaboration of a project for a blast-furnace, the main characters of *Metal-workers* are designing it, and in *The Height* it is actually built. "We're building a powerful all-welded blast-furnace here the like of which has not been built anywhere else in the world. . ."

In each of the above-mentioned novels there are innovators trying to speed up the work and make it more efficient. Among them are engineer Belochkin, steel-founder Yermakov, chief technologist Lukovsky, and work superintendent Tokmakov. There is no need to explain the ideas these innovators expound and defend. At times even they themselves are in no hurry to analyse what benefit can be derived from their ideas in practical terms and what they will cost. You see, it is the principle that counts: an innovatory suggestion is made and this, to the writer's mind,

enables him to reveal the heroes' characters and show the flow of life.

So who is against the wonderful advanced ideas being put into practice as quickly as possible? Belochkin is opposed by Sosnin, the head of the factory's design department. Yermakov has to deal with the icy indifference of shop manager Rumyantsev and crafty intrigues of the shop's chief accountant, Semyonov. Babchenko, the factory's director, personally hands Lukovsky's report back to him without going into detail. Tokmakov is opposed by his immediate chief, work superintendent Deryabin.

And that's all there is to it. All that stands in the way of these innovatory suggestions is concrete people with concrete names. The fate of technological progress and, in the final count, the advance of society as a whole, as far as these novels are concerned, is determined solely by the correlation of forces of good and bad people, of those in favour and those against innovations with an overwhelming majority of the former.

Now let's see why Babchenko, Rumyantsev and other keymen are opposed to innovations? What is it that makes them stand in the way of technological progress? First of all, they want to live quietly, without any extra worries or special responsibilities and would rather avoid risk whenever possible. "I understand," Tokmakov tells Deryabin. "You want to live as quietly as you can and you hide behind all your high-flown talk" (*The Height*). A Party regional committee secretary explains the factory director's opposition to a changeover to local ores thus: "All your objections are based, strictly speaking, on your wish to make life easier for yourself" (*A Busy Time*). In one way or another, the conservatism the authors speak about, is rooted solely in the psychology and misguided views of certain individuals.

Now that we have worked out why Babchenko, Rumyantsev and the other opponents of everything new act as they do, we must find the answer to another, no less important question, namely, where they come from. Consciousness is determined by existence. Life in the country, as it has been made very clear, is socialist. However, the consciousness of various individuals is obviously either not socialist or only partly so. So this means. . .

This means, the positive heroes decide, that conservative inclinations and a hankering after peace and quiet are symptoms of

a psychological disorder, which is purely in the mind and has nothing to do with reality. "It sucks man in like a swamp, sometimes without him even realising it."

This is the right moment to mention that the conservatives in these novels are not all of the same kind but fall into two categories. In the first instance, we are dealing with a psychological predisposition to caution and peace which becomes evident in some people as they grow older or when society's edifying influence over them lessens. In the second instance, conservatism is part of human nature itself and not just a cast of mind.

We have explained how the forces are arranged, diagnosed the sickness, and seen where these sticks-in-the-mud come from in contemporary society. Now we can start battling against them in our daily life. But how should we go about it? That's very obvious. In so far as the initial cause of conservatism has to do with consciousness, "it means we must look into the heart of the matter and attack Victor Matveyevich for his misguided views and political backwardness so that he reconsiders his ideas..." *(First Daring)*.

So, criticism is levelled at the negative heroes which brings about a sharp change in their conservative views and causes them to repent unconditionally. And so now nothing can stop technological progress!

The innovators' totally optimistic world outlook and the amazing ease with which they deal with any obstacles originate directly from the entire picture of social development as it is drawn by the above-mentioned novelists. There are no objective economic factors in the heroes' way. Here we are dealing mostly with the negative heroes, "misguided" views, which can be kneaded like dough. The innovators in these novels are automatically guaranteed the support of the collective and the management. In short, life frustrates the conservatives' attempts to oppose the new and inevitably leads to their defeat.

This is the kind of novel, a feeble imitation of reality, which dominated Soviet literature for a short while. And it is up to researchers to decide what caused works of this kind to be written.

When writing about books so far removed from reality, I found

it hard not to be ironic. However, I am not in the least inclined to look for the root of the matter in the authors' bad intent. No, we are dealing with something much more complex than that. I am convinced that one can only understand the reasons if one bears in mind that this was the time of society's transition from one stage of development to another.

In 1920s-40s Soviet literature gradually mastered forms of epic art more profoundly and fully. In the course of this movement culture gained a momentum, a strong impetus in the direction of epic art. And it is not at all surprising that after the war the epic novel developing on the same lines came up against a reality which could no longer be interpreted in this way and needed other forms to be properly reflected. A perceptible gap appeared between art and reality which was worsened by the dogmatic trend in social thought.

It was once discovered that attempts to apply the epos to a qualitatively different, "prosaic" state of the world resulted in the emergence of Romanticism. On a small scale something similar occurred in our literature in the late 40s and early 50s when certain basic features of the old Romantic school became manifest in the industrial novel. Namely, it showed a tendency to disregard and, as it were, ignore the changes in reality placing itself above its real complexity. It had an idealist conception of the movement of life. Its characters became cardboard images whose main function was to express certain ideas. In short, there was a tendency to write after Schiller rather than in Shakespeare's manner, which would have been preferable, and to alter the world so that it would fit in with the author's own personal perception of reality.

Post-war literature reflected the state of social consciousness at a time when the old ideas about the character and motive forces of the development of socialist society ceased to correspond to the true state of affairs and when no new ideas had yet emerged to replace them. This led to the weakening and, in a number of instances, total ignoring of the socio-psychological motivations behind conflicts and actions. In outward appearance the novel looked just like its predecessors but, having lost its core, it was also deprived of life.

However, this kind of novel on contemporary topics did not

dominate in literature for long. At the very start of the 50s a critical attitude appeared towards books whose heroes destroyed all the obstacles in their way just by snapping their fingers. Soon this critical attitude turned into an outright rejection of counterfeit notes and simplifications in writing, and articles on this subject frequently appeared in the press. It also was with this criticism in view that the Second Congress of Soviet Writers in 1954 discussed the future aims and goals of literature.

3. A TEST OF CHARACTER

"It was pouring with rain for the third day in a row. In three days the sun had only appeared a couple of times for a few hours and not even the roofs had had time to dry out...

"The chairman of the district's foremost and richest collective farm, Demyan Openkin, an obese man with a large paunch, a moustache and short grey hair, was sitting in a wet sail-cloth raincoat in the office of the district Party committee's second secretary...

"Pyotr Martynov, the committee's secretary, was pacing up and down his office, his boots stepping soundlessly across the strips of soft carpet..."

Thus begins Valentin Ovechkin's essay "Everyday Life in the District" which was published in the journal *Novy Mir* in September 1952. It became a notable landmark in the history of Soviet literature and the starting-point of its profound creative renewal.

What conclusion did Ovechkin's social study come to?

"...After Openkin had left, Martynov went on thinking about him for a long time. If only all the collective-farm chairmen in the district were like him! All his affairs run so smoothly: his collective farm is rich and so his people work well, too. But on some of the other collective farms things on the contrary run badly all the time: they earn a mere pittance per work-day because there was a bad harvest last year and the collective farmers worked badly and they did so because last year they were given very little wheat in return for their work. It's a real vicious circle. But it's a vicious circle which has to be broken at

all costs! Who can do it, you may ask? Those who cherish public property as much as if it were their very own. . ."

The writer's first conclusion is very clearly formulated here: the causes of the lag in agriculture are of a purely subjective nature and determined by the fact that indifferent, slow-witted people are in charge of many of the collective farms. *It has all got to do with the collective-farm chairmen* and their capability for organising production. But if that is so, it means that one of the key ways of greatly improving agriculture is to provide all collective farms with capable managers.

Why then isn't it possible to put people like Openkin in charge of all the collective farms? There surely isn't a lack of talent in the country! So it means everything is far from being all right in the local organisations whose job it is to study people and recommend the most worthy, educated and talented ones to the position of collective-farm chairmen. The fault lies in the formalistic, bureaucratic control of collective farms by the district Party committees and district Soviets. The trouble is that key positions in the local Party and government organisations are too often occupied by people like Borzov, the district Party committee's first secretary in Ovechkin's study. Instead of concerning himself with people's well-being and getting to the heart of matters, he worries most about satisfactory statistics and about how the district is faring in the regional report.

At this stage of literary analysis, the criticism of people such as Borzov was still of an almost exclusively moral nature. In the final count, the same solution was offered: the "bad" district Party committee's secretary was to be replaced by a "good" one. However, questions were already emerging which eventually led the writer to the real sources of the social phenomena alarming him. How does such a style of guidance and leadership arise in the first place? Why do the likes of Borzov obviously feel so wonderfully free of responsibility in their jobs? Where do they come from? How can one solve the problem of replacing them everywhere?

Ovechkin discovered that a different style of guidance cannot be firm and lasting unless a number of objective factors are altered. The likes of Borzov will crop up time and time again while the work of the district Party committee's secretary is estimated

only by the speed with which he takes up the next campaign on the agenda and by district's place in the regional statistical report. It is impossible to get rid of the likes of Borzov while the enthusiastic administrator is not made really responsible to the people he is in charge of. What's more, Borzov is *essential* because in the existing conditions he has an indispensable knack of getting plans fulfilled by hook or by crook. Stable economic progress is impossible if it relies solely on people's personal qualities. A realistic programme of action must be based not so much on having chairmen capable of improving agriculture in the most unfavourable conditions as on the creation of objective conditions in which the collective farms would function normally under any basically honest and intelligent manager.

Thus, having turned to the objective, economic aspect of the matter, Ovechkin finally came to the subject of the collective farmer's personal interest in the running of things, which meant more than just the material incentive attached to his wages. It is necessary that the collective farmer should exert real influence on all aspects of collective farm management and that he should feel its master. This idea of personal responsibility was central to the recent agricultural "programme" proposed in essays and articles about the countryside at the beginning of the 60s. And, although the programme seemed fairly plain and simple, the writers had to work hard to get to its crux and experienced great difficulty discovering the truths and testing them many times over.

The books published in the mid-fifties but, of course, written earlier, kept all the outward attributes of the forerunning industrial novels. They depicted the struggle around innovatory technological ideas, the conflicts between creative, progressive-minded people and conservative, backward ones. And they all ended with the edifying victory of the former and unconditional capitulation of the latter. However, all the while a reshaping of ideas was taking place deep inside these works. Invisible jolts were shattering yesterday's dogmas, forming cracks which began to let in life, first in trickles and then in increasingly more powerful torrents.

One of the books bearing the hallmark of the transitional period is Daniil Granin's novel *Those Who Seek,* which was

written in 1951-1954. Old and new elements in the artistic motivations and exposition of characters are interwoven in the tightest possible manner here.

What is Granin's story really about?

Andrei Lobanov has defended his thesis and should be going into teaching but he has become enthralled by a complex technological problem which is to create an essentially new device for locating faults in electric cables. And acting regardless of anything, he manages to get an appointment as head of a laboratory at Leningrad's power grids. It turns out that his immediate superior is an old institute friend, Victor Potapenko. A curious conversation takes place between the two friends at Victor's home while they are celebrating their reunion.

" '. . .I've got an idea about a certain gadget and this is the only place where it can be worked out. . .'

" 'You're very naive, my lad, you don't know the iron laws of production. . .'

" 'What's production got to do with me! I'm not going to be involved in your production. . .'

" 'Just a minute!' Victor smiled ironically. 'Let me bring you down to earth, Comrade Utopian. Do you know what you'll be doing? A cable breaks somewhere—find out where and why. . . Repair the instruments. Test the insulators, and be quick about it, or the head of the technical department, yours truly, will be out on the war path after you. Argue with the supply agents, make up the reports and memorandums. That's our science for you.'

" 'I've come here to work out a new apparatus. I shall elbow off these administrative burdens of yours for all I am worth. Otherwise, you're quite right, Victor, this perpetual routine can suck you down. . .'

" 'I'm afraid you won't get anywhere. When I tried to make a name for myself out of science, I had to burn the midnight oil.'

" 'If it doesn't work out, I'll leave,' said Andrei. 'In any case, I mean to have a go at doing some science during the daytime.'

" 'Where? At our place?' Victor asked again in a pitying tone.

" 'Yes, at *your place*. . .' "

Granin's novel is a literary experiment whose aim is to solve

this argument. The critical situation chosen by the writer is designed to test Lobanov's strength of character and the "iron laws of production" mentioned by Potapenko. The author tries to discover whether routine production work and creative scientific research really are so incompatible but he first has to discern the forces determining scientific and technological progress and the ways in which they work.

And so Lobanov becomes the head of a small laboratory which has to cope with all sorts of odd jobs. It is run by engineers but now, as they admit themselves, "only dusty, rust-eaten fragments remained" of their former qualifications. As one such engineer, Borisov by name, says: "I've just been tied up with a lot of silly little jobs and two years have slipped by already... There was no need to have been quite good enough. But I'm still kicking. I read the magazines. I do problems, just so as not to forget. I try to keep my stock in good condition. But what's the use! You can't do it that way. We've been taught that existence determines consciousness. Well, just look at our existence..."

The laboratory chief has enough power to get the engineers transferred to a separate room and a dark store-room turned into his "office". Then things become much more difficult. By refusing point-blank to repair the machines, Lobanov becomes an enemy of Potapenko's assistant, Dolgin, who uses the laboratory to do various kinds of extra work to keep the power supply Management Board on good terms with its stations. What's more, the men in the laboratory soon begin grumbling out loud for their earnings depend directly on this repair work.

By trying to reform everything that is going on in the laboratory, Lobanov comes into conflict with Potapenko, who has to start "out on the war path" after his subordinate for neglecting the urgent needs of production although Potapenko fully sympathises with his good intentions. "Victor saw the cause of a lot of the trouble in the policy of the Ministry—for failure to fulfil the plan heads went rolling by the dozen, but with automation and new devices nobody seemed to worry whether they come in this year or next. Conservatism, the safety-comes-first policy arose from circumstances. One wasn't born a conservative..."

It also appeared that Lobanov's idea clashed with the interests

of Professor Tonkov, a recognised authority on electrical engineering whose apparatus has been used in power transmission lines for many decades. The professor did not seem at all eager to help his young rival.

Reading through the industrial novels of the late 40s and early 50s, you sometimes get a glimpse of true-to-life circumstances which did, in fact, provide the motives for the conservatives' actions. As a rule, however, these only consist of isolated sentences, paragraphs and, at the most, a couple of pages.

This is not true, however, of Granin's novel whose entire exposition takes the reader into the world of genuine human relations and makes him realise the extent of the difficulties in the main character's way. We are shown characters who are bound to definite social conditions, and by no means acting the way they do because of some inherent conservative tendencies (Potapenko, Dolgin, Professor Tonkov). However, the author himself was not yet ready to follow the logic of these vital processes. After reaching a certain invisible point, he reared sharply and followed a track, which had been well-beaten by his forerunners. That is, he found an artificial solution for the industrial conflicts.

Granin did not go along with one of his protagonists who placed Lobanov before two alternatives ("either he will knuckle under, or he will chuck everything and go away. In either case we shall be no better off than we were to start with"). "Yet there must be some as yet unrevealed path that combined the fascination of research with the crowded, active life of industry. . ." And the author wants to find this path, this ideal third option for Lobanov. However, he looks for it in a somewhat voluntarist manner, meddling in the natural course of events, playing up to Lobanov and sparing him fate's cruellest blows.

So how did Lobanov overcome the obstacle of an economic nature which suddenly stood in his way? He simply got hold of some handbooks and taught himself the rudiments of book-keeping. And how did he manage to clear up the conflict which had arisen between him and the workers? Again, he simply gave them a lecture on the laboratory's attractive future prospects and got them interested in the idea of a radar.

Lovanov's opponents, who are sufficiently life-like figures at the beginning, undergo a highly complex transformation in the course

of the author's repressive actions. For instance, Potapenko degenerates into a petty intriguer whose goal is to get the job of the power grid's chief engineer. He also becomes the main obstacle in the way of innovations, pushed all other objective causes into the background. And one is led to believe that Potapenko's imminent undoing both in his private life and at work will totally clear the way for innovations and solve all the problems.

Galina Nikolayeva's novel *The Battle Along the Road,* which was published in 1958, had far-reaching social repercussions. Today, over two decades later, it is perfectly clear that Nikolayeva's analysis of reality was authentic only in the first half of the novel.

What is this work all about?

On a business trip Valgan, the director of a large tractor factory, meets Bakhirev, a tank-factory worker, and offers him the job of chief engineer. He reckons that Bakhirev, a provincial, will not only mind his P's and Q's but also be a reliable assistant.

" 'I've got plenty of ideas of my own. What I lack is people to carry them out,' Valgan explained his choice. 'But he's the sort of person who, if he sets to, will make a go of things. . .' "

Valgan looks upon Bakhirev as a "brick" and a slogger and wants him to get into bustling factory life as quickly as possible.

" 'Get hold of crankshafts for me and report back in an hour.'

" 'Semyon Petrovich,' droned the chief engineer in a discontented tone. 'Look, it's not my job to go round hunting for things. . .'

" 'Oh, I see! Well, what are you here for then? What is your job?'

" 'It is the job of a factory's chief engineer to see the future prospects of production and get it going on these lines.'

"The 'brick' did not want to lie in place. It appears he, the 'brick', had plans and aspirations of his own."

The aloof oafish engineer started work at the new enterprise by making a detailed study of the manufacturing process. Day after day, he roamed round the factory, feeling its pulse and trying to see every stage of the process. He first visited the primitive foundry and ended up eventually at the assembly shop full of shining metal and glass. And he evaluated the finished product—the tractor—and its manufacture not only with the expe-

rienced eye of an engineer but also with the inexperienced eye of a newcomer who could spot faults in the most familiar things which were usually passed over.

With his technological expertise and aesthetical intuition, Bakhirev sensed that not just imperfect models but even faulty ones were coming off the factory's conveyor day and night. The cumbersome, slow-speed tractor, which frequently broke down, instead of showing its true potential was merely replacing a harnessed horse.

One day Bakhirev dropped in to see Shatrov, the factory's chief constructor and was shocked to see some sketches of an ultra-modern tractor which the latter had done on the sly. How was it that the new machinery was being designed in such a way, after working hours? " 'That's the way it is,' Shatrov shrugged his shoulders. 'That's how we all work, if we want to get anything done. Factories have got a plan to keep to. The directors stake their Party membership and wages on the plan, on economic statistical indices, but as far as introducing new models, they only answer for it in theory.' "

What's more, Bakhirev realises that the method of constructing the tractors is out of date and no longer answers the modern laws of production. "He could already clearly see the factory's faults: the weakness of its metallurgical base, backward techniques, worn-out machines and personnel turn-over." He was appalled by the glaring gap between the quality of machinery in the main shops and those in the auxiliary ones. "The whole factory was in a fever brought on by the bog in the iron foundry." And in general, the enterprise could not possibly work normally when it had to bear the brunt of being almost totally self-sufficient.

As he gets to the bottom of all these problems and tries to understand the specific contradictions he comes up against at the factory, Bakhirev cannot help but think of them as phenomena of a far-reaching, general nature. The heavy manual labour at this modern factory causes him to ponder over the faults in the planning. After pondering over defects in the tractors, he begins thinking about the complexities of social progress in general. "...The country's productive forces are on the verge of a great upsurge! They feel confined and are struggling inside

the old forms of organisation and you and I here are struggling with them!"

After comprehending the scale and nature of the obstacles ahead of him, the hero naturally gets a clear idea of the steps which must be taken. He puts this idea into clear-cut slogans: "Hand over the production of some kinds of tools and machinery to specialised factories! Utilise the freed space and capacities to increase the main output! Mass production! Specialisation! Cooperation! These are the main tasks!" "Planning. I understand all the complexity of planning in such a vast country as ours. But it's got to be done. It really has! If not, we'll never boost production." "The workers' life, fair compensation for their labour, their maximum personal interest in uninterrupted progress—that is what we've got to concentrate all our thoughts and efforts on."

Bakhirev's ideas, which are also very much to the point today, in the late 50s were truly innovatory for a novel about contemporary life. They testified to the fact that literature was more and more consistently transcending the vicious circle of ideas which saw the "lagging behind" of consciousness in its own specific features, and showed that writers were capable of heeding the urgent demands of life. However, as a rule, the answers to these problems were much more profoundly expressed in a journalistic form rather than in fiction. The writer was so anxious to explore the new territory he had discovered and so eager to show the attainment of the tasks he had formulated that he tended to outstrip life, so to speak, and disregard the characters' inner logic. This is true of Galina Nikolayeva in her novel.

Bakhirev gradually realises that many of the contradictions he has discovered can only be solved by major state policies. "He repeated over and over again the simple formula of his new future: 'I cannot work at a factory like this. So I've got to either leave or change it.' " But can he possibly change the factory? Evidently not. " 'I can't budge this massive mountain.' "

A discrepancy appears between the journalistic and literary fibre of the novel when Nikolayeva attempts "to budge this massive mountain" right there and then, at the factory in question, in the time-span covered by the plot and not beyond it, some-

time in the future. It was only possible for the author to solve the main hero's "formula" in his favour, as Granin had done in *Those Who Seek,* by making certain simplifications and stipulations and by arbitrarily intruding in the natural course of events. And this means, first and foremost, artificially changing the image of the factory's director.

In the first half of the novel, Valgan is a very life-like figure whose very contradictions help the author to create a character, integral in its own way. His most characteristic trait is his inexhaustible, effervescent energy. He passed for a brilliant organiser, who in the most difficult conditions managed to change over to another make of tractor without stopping production. He is exacting, tenacious and sharp but, if need be, can quickly control his temper, change his tone and avert an imminent conflict. He is very good at getting out of tricky situations in production by using all his resources.

Valgan is well aware of his enterprise's faults: "Do you think we don't all see what our factory's like? You can find traces of three ages in it." He is sincerely delighted with the chief engineer's plan. " 'It reads just like a novel! It's all just a question of time, of course.' " Valgan knew that the factory was working under maximum stress. " 'The time's not ripe yet for change. If we don't budget funds well in advance and prepare for it in good time, we'll get so far behind with the plan that it'll take us over a year to get back on course.' "

In real life Valgan could, of course, have said much more about the inevitable and, at that moment, insurmountable difficulties facing the execution of Bakhirev's plan, according to which all the factory processes were to be specialised and automatised. In this instance it would obviously not have been enough just to budget funds well in advance for one was dealing with the material bases of industry as a whole.

So how is the conflict solved?

The objective reasons, which Bakhirev gradually discovered, for the "feverish state of factory life" begin to recede into the background and, in the tradition of foregoing novels, it becomes more and more obvious that the main obstacle in the way of the factory's reorganisation plans is its director, Valgan. Valgan's own *difficulties,* for instance, that his chief constructor's talents

are being wasted, are now presented in the novel as his *fault* as director. Thus ends the spontaneous development of a character reflecting the contradictions of the conditions forming him. As the expressive chapter heading, "Valgan Changes Face", suggests, the character's portrayal splits in two and his real essence and the author's subjective appraisal diverge.

In order to prove that the root of all evil lies in the factory director's personal traits, the writer temporarily removes Valgan from the action (he is taken ill during a business trip). Bakhirev gets the chance to try out his ideas in practice. And then we have a traditional happy ending. The author has Valgan expelled from the Party and sent off as an ordinary engineer to another factory. Valgan's protector, Blikin, a regional Party committee secretary, loses his job. Bakhirev is appointed director. "Two long-awaited ministerial orders lay on his desk. One authorised the transfer of the production of diesel engines to a factory specialising in that type of production and the other authorised the construction of new shops." In one night Bakhirev draws up a new project in which all the factory's work is put on the production line. " 'I know one thing for sure at the moment: my former maximum plan is only just going to make it as a minimum one. . .' "

Thus, Galina Nikolayeva's novel contains both old and new elements. It deals with the deep social causes of conflicts in industry but does so under the same illusion as before, namely that the problems of technological progress may be solved by replacing one factory director by another. Even if the author did grasp the true nature of the contradictions reflected in the heroes' characters, this was not fully felt in the work's plot and characters.

After its publication in 1956, Vladimir Dudintsev's novel *Not by Bread Alone* won wide acclaim and aroused a lively debate. Shortly afterwards, however, the novel was sharply criticised by Nikita Khrushchev and critically reviewed by the press, which in the West resulted in a heightened interest in the book. It was then published in a number of foreign countries and a considerable amount of material was written about it.

I should mention that re-editions of the novel have been appearing for a long time now and it is read and appreciated by a wide reading public as well as by literary historians. Judging

by today's standards, there is nothing particularly out of the ordinary about it but in the 50s its unusual qualities were very striking. Dudintsev was the first writer dealing with a contemporary topic to succeed not only in showing that the characters he described were socially determined but also in remaining faithful to the inner logic of their development. This step in the progress of literature was inevitable for it was prepared by many other works: the discovery of a new reality could not stop halfway and after a series of "semi-complete" novels, someone had to write a novel that was "complete".

I shall give a short résumé of the book's content.

Dmitri Lopatkin, a physics school-teacher in Siberia, is very keen on inventions. After a lot of hard work he manages to solve a complex technological problem and expound the principles of an economic and highly productive centrifugal process by which cast-iron pipes may be founded. But how can he get his idea tried out in practice? There is a machine-building plant nearby and Lopatkin decides to go there, especially seeing that the plant director, Leonid Drozdov, is married to a teacher he knows. Drozdov imprudently promises to get his project pushed forward. However, shortly afterwards the plant gets a ministerial order to use the project of another centrifugal machine elaborated by a group of scientists and designers under the direction of an illustrious professor by the name of Avdiyev. What's more, the plant is instructed to build this machine as quickly as possible.

"Experience had taught Drozdov that one should never, even unwittingly, stand in the way of authoritative people working unhindered on projects with a good future. What's more, it would even be foolhardy to keep up an artificial neutrality in this matter at a time when ministerial orders forced you to side with the interested party by obliging you to construct Avdiyev's model in the shortest possible time." That is why his conversation with Lopatkin after the latter again came to complain, was not very easy.

" 'I'm not offended. You're acting rightly. Only you've got one weak point: you've no grounds to complain. I'm not obliged to support your project. Our plant is not intended for making pipes... You should have gone to persons with authority in this matter and not here.' "

" 'And your second mistake,' Drozdov wearily shut his eyes, 'is that you're out on a limb. People don't work single-handed any more. Our new machines are designed by collectives. You're hardly likely to get anywhere, as nobody will agree to work on your project...' He smiled sadly.

" 'Yes, yes, I understand...' The inventor also smiled but his smile was slighter... 'Please do forgive me...' He stood up and flapped his arms resignedly. 'Strictly speaking, I never meant to get into this business... I might be out on a limb but I'm not doing it all for my own sake, you know... Thank you. Good-bye.' He bowed slightly and strode boldly towards the door."

Leonid Drozdov, whom the unfortunate inventor left without getting anything for his pains, is an interesting figure. The author succeeded in creating a life-like and by no means one-dimensional character. He certainly does not belong to the type of "negative hero" prevalent in the post-war industrial novels whose inherent conservative qualities or temporary delusions caused them to stand in the way of progress. Drozdov has his feet well planted in the ground and goes his own way in life and nothing, no secret devices would enable the author to change this impression.

In his younger days Drozdov worked as a carpenter, building huts in villages. Staring down from a photograph on a wall in his home is "a young peasant in a peaked cap, a black jacket and new boots. He was sitting with his knees wide apart and arms akimbo, straight and haughty." And during the war an industrial plant was built under his direction in the most difficult conditions at Muzga, a remote Siberian station.

Short, gaunt, with big yellowish ears and a modest bearing, Drozdov, nevertheless, gave instructions to people "in a firm voice and with a slight ironical smile. He solved complex problems in a trice and under his direction the plant's affairs ran in a straight, steadily ascending line". His managerial talents and various, often humorous stories about his work were discussed in the township "in reverent and somewhat hostile undertones".

Drozdov returned from Moscow in an excellent frame of mind. He had been offered the post of running one of the ministry's departments and had given his consent. " 'Well, I've built the plant,' he thought to himself, slightly closing his eyes, as the

sleigh's runners whined. 'I didn't do a bad job during the war and got banners and orders for it... Well, I'm now fifty two ... which means I've still got about thirteen years of work left... That's not bad at all!... You can still do a hell of a lot in that time!' "

During his last week at Muzga Drozdov worked particularly hard, staying on at the plant until late at night. The end was in sight. " 'I must give such a display of strength before I leave that Ganichev will never do as well as me. That'll be Drozdov's grand finale!' " he confided to his wife. However, when his wife, Nadya, said this was not at all like him and that, in actual fact, he was better than he made out, Drozdov stopped in front of the mirror and began speaking about what he was really like.

"That's who I am... And I can see a lot of flaws in this man. A lot of vestiges of the past. He's a person who belongs to a transitional phase. He still has a little bit of what used to be called 'ambition'. And I don't understand how you can live without it!.. And there're still a lot of weaknesses in me because I love life!.. Of course, my sort would have been out of place in a communist society. I'm all covered over with scales and shells. But I'm perfectly acceptable as a builder of communism, yes, I'm up to the mark. And that's my place in life..."

When Drozdov became the head of the ministry's technological department, his "inner essence" was, of course, manifested somewhat differently. The department head turned out to be "stricter and colder than the director". He began to show more signs of "mimicry" which Nadya with her excellent moral instinct had always sensed in him but had never been able to put a name to. However, Drozdov does not actually change in the course of the novel. He remains the same "person who belongs to a transitional phase", a builder of society, who, alas, has a lot of flaws. He is vulnerable only to the moral criticism of his wife, who deals him his one painful blow by leaving him. In his official duties "he was afraid of nothing. No blows, not even the ones specially aimed at Drozdov, had ever reached him. He always managed to dodge out of the way so that the blow missed its target".

But how does the novel's main theme develop?

During the eight years he has striven towards his goal, Lopat-

kin has met all sorts of obstacles in his way, among which indifference and a lack of personal interest were perhaps the least unpleasant. Gradually, however, one main obstacle comes to the fore and its name is monopoly of scientific ideas.

In a conversation with Lopatkin vice-minister Shutikov speaks frankly about the nature of the obstacles standing in the inventor's way. "...There's a whole group of people whose life is linked to this business with the pipes. Yes, linked for good to it. They've built themselves a kind of Scythian town, thrown a wall round it, divided up the duties and are now living by the Malthusian Doctrine and controlling the birth rate. You can't see the town but it's there beyond all doubt! Just like the town of Kitezh!"

Lopatkin eventually achieves his goal but his opponents, unlike the main characters in *Those Who Seek, The Battle Along the Road* and in many other novels of that time, by no means throw themselves at their victor's mercy. Shutikov joins the board of another ministry. Drozdov is appointed in his place. Professor Avdiyev gets off with a light criticism of his institute.

Thus the novel ends but the debate continues. "And although Lopatkin's machine had already been built and *delivered,* he again suddenly caught sight of the road ahead, a road most likely without end, running towards the horizon. It was waiting for him, stretching out before him and luring him with its mysterious curves and harsh responsibility."

Now, many years on, Dudintsev's novel has found a place of its own in the history of literary and social thought. As I have already mentioned, the tendency to depict the main character in unity with the circumstances forming him, which was recognisable in a number of works, was in this novel displayed still more fully and consistently.

4. QUESTS. FORFEITS. DISCOVERIES

In the 50s a transition took place in the history of Soviet society: the new formation, which had been established, was now developing and functioning on the basis of the specific laws governing it. The "stormy reality" (Gorky) of the previous

period determined the way of life of millions of people and gave rise to a complex system of human relations. A certain shift now occurred in the historically changeable relations between man and his environment, the character and circumstances: circumstances became more complex and "fixed" and man, more dependent on external conditions. In compliance with this, the "colouring" of social mentality changed and social consciousness was reorientated. And all this was reflected in the evolution of writing.

Soviet classical fiction had attained remarkable results in the creation of an epic character. We have already examined its distinctive features. The epic hero has dealings with a reality in which everything is in a state of flux. He, as it were, breaks through the circle of his immediate milieu and deals directly with the fundamental issues of the universe. He suddenly comes face to face with a historical alternative, forcing him to make a choice right there and then with all the ensuing consequences. He takes full responsibility for the course of world events and for the results of his actions, rejecting all excuses and extenuating circumstances. He feels he has been entrusted with a noble, humane mission for whose sake he sometimes fights single-handed against what seems like insurmountable obstacles and difficulties. His independence in choosing a way in life and in achieving definite socio-historical goals is of a real and concrete nature.

In the post-war novel on contemporary topics one might think one is dealing with the same type of relations between the hero and his milieu. However, these relations are, in fact, epic in a purely superficial and formal sense. The hero is conventional, that is, he possesses all kinds of virtues but his character lacks contradictions and genuine depth. Conventional, too, are the circumstances in which he acts. And although describing life's changes this epic type of novel proves illusory. There is no natural inner development of characters and no forces which might clash in an irreconcilable conflict.

The voluntarist notions of the course of social development and the extent to which the hero was able to exert influence on the world about him, on which such novels were based, were very soon shaken. The epic hero gradually became immersed in the new milieu, at first applying former scales and values to it. For

a while there was a discrepancy between the character and circumstances, the same discrepancy which had once given birth to the literary image of Don Quixote.

In Ovechkin's essay *The Hard Spring* Martynov, the first secretary of the district committee, came to the regional Party committee with the strange suggestion of replacing him in his post by someone else. He is convinced that Dolgushin, the director of an agricultural machinery service station, will cope better with the work. However, the officials at the regional Party committee have no idea what he is getting at.

" 'Then I don't understand what's behind all this. . .'

" 'Nothing is really, Alexei Petrovich.'

" 'What's all this romantic nonsense about, and, what's more, in Party work? What do you think you are, a knight in shining armour?' Krylov leaned towards Martynov and looked him straight in the eye. 'You're not a Don Quixote by any chance, are you, Comrade Martynov?' "

Krylov has hit the nail on the head. Martynov, who is prepared to forgo everything in the interests of his work, definitely is quixotic. And he is not the only one. Lobanov of *Those Who Seek,* Lopatkin of *Not by Bread Alone,* Bakhirev of *The Battle Along the Road*—they all are totally unselfish and loyal to lofty ideals. Like Don Quixote, they march boldly into battle, doubting nothing and refusing to question whether they are strong enough to tackle the obstacles facing them.

Let us recall the appraisal won by the knight of La Mancha who set himself the task of "eradicating all kinds of falsehood". "Don Quixote is an intelligent and noble man who devoted himself totally and with all the passion of an energetic soul to an idea he cherished," wrote the great Russian critic Belinsky of Cervantes' hero. "Everyone has a little of Don Quixote in him, the Don Quixotes of this world are mostly people with a fervent imagination, a loving and noble heart, and even strong will and mind but without a sense and measure of reality."[2]

Aren't the characters we have mentioned rather like this?

The main distinctive attribute of Martynov, Lobanov, Lopatkin and Bakhirev is intense and resolute purposefulness. As Bakhirev said: "I live by the idea of the country's technological superiority," and he really means it. "For him these were not words,

they were reality, they were the main purpose and inspiration of all his life." This is what Party organiser Chubasov thought about Bakhirev. One of the main characters of *Not by Bread Alone* characterised Lopatkin thus: "I say you're a believer. You believe in your idea and you fight for it." Andrei Lobanov was always interested in people who were obsessed by a creative idea and he himself belongs to this type.

The heroes' actions seem terribly impractical to the people around them who constantly feel like giving them lessons in worldly wisdom. Lobanov's laboratory colleagues put him in the "charmingly hopeless" category of romantics trying to change the world single-handed. The power grid's chief engineer tries to "knock the childish idealism out of this day-dreamer and make him see reason". "He may be no fool but perhaps he's a maniac?" says to himself one of the tractor factory's specialists as he thinks about Bakhirev. Vadim Nevrayev warns Lopatkin against quixotism: " 'Dmitry Alexeyevich,' he said in an undertone. 'Don't draw your sword against a windmill.' " But the warning comes too late and the authors' sympathy is obviously with the idealists and day-dreamers and not with the commonsensical Nevrayevs.

After choosing a goal, the heroes discover, as is said of Bakhirev, "the unyielding strength to overcome" and push on through all obstacles in the way of this goal. "You're battering the old forms of organisation," a colleague of Bakhirev says to him, using the most fitting verb. ". . .Once he had set out towards something, Bakhirev had to go on to the end, come what may; he carried everything through to its conclusion, even when mistaken. A horse, which has taken the bit between its teeth, rushes straight towards a hedge, knowing that it will hurt itself badly but unable to stop, and the same was true of Bakhirev." It was not for nothing he was called "the torpedo" at the Urals factory. Once he had taken aim, "he would attack with all his power and might, never looking back or diverting his attention, oblivious of the risks or dangers". Such also is Lobanov's character. He saw the goal ahead of him and that was all that mattered.

This kind of hero is morally incapable of making concessions or choosing an easy way out. "No compromises, do you hear! Not one!" exclaims Lobanov when the opportunity presents itself

to construct a new apparatus by pretending it was co-designed by Potapenko. Bakhirev is described as not being capable of "manoeuvring". Both Martynov and Lopatkin refuse to make compromises. They are incapable of adapting themselves to circumstances and getting on with necessary people or of retreating even one step from the course they have chosen.

Heroes of this kind are indifferent to material comforts. Lobanov leaves the institute for a job in industry where he gets paid less but "even if he had been sent there as an ordinary engineer, he would still have agreed without a moment's hesitation". Martynov turns down the offer to go and work at the Party regional committee. After being removed from the post of chief engineer, Bakhirev stays on at the factory as a rank-and-file specialist. "Hard work and battles, cold and hunger—he knew them all and could force his way through thick and thin, oblivious to everything, as long as he felt in complete harmony with himself as he had done ever since his youth." As Lopatkin admits: "In order to just stay alive, you need bread. But no matter how hungry I was, I would have always traded in my bread for a little faith." And it is also absolutely necessary for each of these characters to be totally and utterly involved in their work. "Nothing can distract him from his work. The ground may be burning under his feet and stones raining on his head but he will still keep plodding on in the same direction, towards the factory" *(The Battle Along the Road)*.

In the aesthetic sense, quixotic heroes like Bakhirev are strongly pronounced epic characters. To recall Hegel, we are dealing here with "independent, totally self-reliant individuals who set themselves particular goals, which are exclusively theirs and dictated only by their own individuality. They translate their goals into reality with constant fervour and without additional reflexion (Nebenreflexion)..."[3] This "independent, strong and integral heroic character ... knows nothing about the contrast between subjective intentions and the objective act and its consequences (weiss von diesem Gegensatze der subjektiven Absichten und der objektiven Tat und ihrer Folgen nichts)", nor does he "detach himself from that ethical whole (sittlichen Ganzen ab) to which he belongs". He knows of nothing in his surroundings which exists independently of him.[4]

The image of a man who never wavers or lets anything get in the way of his goal is truly magnificent. Time and again literature will put forward and affirm as the aesthetic ideal a hero who is in complete harmony with himself, and is prepared to battle against any obstacles without a moment's hesitation. However, this is possible only under one indispensable condition: such a hero should have dealings with a special epic state of the world and interact with corresponding external circumstances.

Let us imagine for a moment that Cervantes stopped treating Don Quixote with a touch of irony and decided to make him a truly epic hero, come what may. And then Dulcinea at once becomes a real princess, the windmills turn into dragons and all evil vanishes into thin air as soon as the noble knight appears on his Rocinante... But didn't something of the kind happen in the novels we have just mentioned? In order to preserve the characteristic attributes of the epic hero, the writers had to adapt the conditions of his milieu to suit him, spare him needless blows of fate, avoid economic factors and remove or transform the images of his opponents.

This solution, of course, could not be satisfactory and lasting. "The measure of reality", which Belinsky had spoken of, took writers further and made them re-create the hero's sphere of activity in an increasingly more concrete manner, and in all its real complexity. The way in which the obstacles in the hero's way were simplified was at first hard to detect but gradually became more obvious and, consequently, less permissible. Ovechkin actually admitted: "Frankly speaking, it's much harder for my Martynov and Dolgushin in real life than in fiction."[5]

By contriving various devices, writers for a while succeeded in adapting circumstances to the epic hero but the reverse process, that is, to adapt the epic hero to qualitatively different circumstances was impossible from the start. To quote Ovechkin again, "some characters don't bend, they just snap".[6] And this is what happens to quixotic types like Martynov, Lobanov, and Bakhirev. A small compromise in life, the slightest manoeuvring or minor concession to circumstances would "snap" these characters at once and make them completely different from the aesthetic viewpoint. True, we would still regard them as knowledgeable, experienced, energetic, sincere, creative, purposeful, and unselfish

people but they would now belong to another type of literary hero—a character closely bound to his milieu and reflecting its specific features. The latter's activity is limited to the conditions which have been dictated to him from outside and his contribution to the common cause is the resultant of subjective aspirations and objective circumstances.

The first enigma, which had to be solved by literature in the 50s (in keeping with the new conditions of life), was to discover the origin of the negative hero. Such an attempt was made by Leonid Leonov in the character of Gratsiansky from his novel *The Russian Forest* (1953). The latter personage came on the scene, and writers and journalists began discussing figures like Borzov and Drozdov, now a life-like character. An explanation for the enigmatic appearance in contemporary socialist society of negative phenomena and people spreading them had been found on the whole. And this could not but affect the former arrangement of fictional characters.

When examined together with the conditions of reality forming them and not out of context, yesterday's negative heroes were seen to be not so implicitly negative. More and more often the central heroes of fiction were people who could not be labelled simply as good or bad. Their characters were the product of a whole complex of social relations and their contradictions reflected those of life. The sharp clash of characters whose aspirations put them poles apart continued to be a possible artistic device but ceased to be obligatory and universal for disclosing the movement of life.

Neither could time pass over the positive hero, who had previously become habitual in literature as the bearer of the aesthetic ideal. Up to a certain stage writers and readers alike took him for granted. Both Ovechkin's Martynov and Granin's Lobanov with all their positive qualities are, as it were, axioms, which do not require proof. When writers began to understand existence more clearly and recognise the profound influence on the personality not only of general conditions, but also its immediate milieu, they realised they had to show in depth the socially determined nature of people's behaviour, including that of the leading characters in their books.

I shall recall an old argument about the motives of social

activity which was conducted in Lev Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* by two brothers, Konstantin Levin and Sergei Koznishev.

Levin regarded his brother as someone "gifted with the ability to work for the common good". However, the better he got to know Sergei, the more he noticed that he, like other good-doers, "were brought to this love of the common good not by the bidding of their hearts but by reason, which told them it was right to do this, and that alone was why they did it". That is why during their conversation by a picturesque pond where Koznishev, visiting his brother, is enjoying the peace and quiet of village life and Levin is dying of boredom, the two find it so hard to understand one another.

" '. . .I told you before and I tell you now: it's all wrong that you should not attend meetings and that in general you should hold yourself aloof from your local affairs. If all honest men withdrew it stands to reason things would be run God only knows how. . .'

" 'I tried it,' replied Levin quietly and as if reluctantly. 'I just can't. What's to be done?' "

Koznishev does not give up trying to make Levin admit that community work is useful and necessary. Can he really not see the great public benefit of hospitals and schools? Wasn't he at all concerned about the common good? And where is his self-esteem?

"Levin felt that he had been morally driven into a corner and that was why he became flustered and, without meaning to, came out with the main reason for his indifference to public activities.

" 'Perhaps all these things are good, but why should I bother myself about the setting up of medical centres which I shall never use, and schools to which I shall never send my children. . .' "

" 'I think,' Konstantin said, 'that no activity can be lasting if it is not rooted in one's personal interests. This is a common truth, a philosophical truth. . .' "

No, this type of hero could never be accused of hypocrisy. There is nothing in the world that does not concern them: their personal interest, passion and the inspiration of all their life totally coincide with general causes of great significance. And still, literature once again came close to the "philosophical truth"

which Konstantin Levin had once spoken of. True, Martynov and Bakhirev are ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of their goal and are not afraid of "hard work and battles, cold and hunger". But will others be capable of doing the same in their everyday lives? And is it right that personal and common concerns should only coincide when individuals ascetically renounce worldly comforts? Is it right that Lobanov's and Lopatkin's self-oblivious scientific research and their material well-being should be incompatible? Can progress in any sphere be guaranteed unless it is firmly based, apart from other things, on personal interest? How can one today solve the problem which worried Konstantin Levin a hundred years ago: that man not only lives for himself but also for others?

These questions are extremely vital to a society of developed socialism and they are still being studied by literature and tried out in practice.

In this chapter we have mainly dealt with the inner change in literary aesthetic, which came about as society moved from one stage to the next. However, the concrete forms this change took are also of considerable interest.

In the 50s a noticeable change occurred in literary genres. Contrary to what had been discussed at the First All-Union Writers' Congress, major epic genres, such as the novel and poem, began to lose ground and smaller ones, such as the story, the novella and lyrical verse, came to the fore. The boundaries between different genres became less sharply outlined, and some of them began to "melt", giving rise to various intermediate and synthetic genre forms.

Substantial changes took place in the themes of literature. The industrial theme in both its urban and rural setting no longer dominated the scene. As a reaction to the recent industrial novel, writers began to prefer various kinds of unusual and sometimes exotic circumstances. Quite often the protagonists of the stories and novellas were geologists, foresters, raftsmen, fishermen, buoy keepers, in short, people who either lived alone in isolated places or worked and showed their true worth in small collectives. A literary study of people's private lives began. The concepts of "man and his work" were now interpreted very differently. Man began to be associated less with his profession and official func-

tion, and proved more important than his pursuit and more interesting as a personality.

A characteristic feature of literature in the second half of the 50s is its exacting demand of authenticity. After rejecting all the discredited theories on what life and its literary representation should be like, writers tried to reveal reality as it really was. This gave a special role to the fictional feature-story in the literary process and made sociological essays such as Vladimir Soloukhin's *A Drop of Dew* and Yefim Dorosh's *Country Diary* noteworthy. Literature was discovering the new reality, making a deep study of it and broadening its horizons, at times performing the duties of sociology which had yet to develop into a mature science.

During the transitional period not only was lyrical poetry intensely developed but waves of lyricism actually swept over vast areas of literature. Only superficially did this penchant for lyricism in literature oppose the one for documents and facts. Indeed, its authors showed their strong faith in the authenticity of human emotions without which a fictional representation of reality is impossible. It is not fortuitous, for example, that the abovementioned novella of Soloukhin *A Drop of Dew* and his *Vladimir Tracks* were original lyrical studies of life in which the strictly documentary elements in no way conflicted with the author's lyricism.

In the 50s new works appeared which became known collectively as "young literature". It was also a phenomenon characteristic only of a transitional period. Young writers wrote about themselves and their contemporaries, easily breaking with the previous criteria set by literary criticism. Lyricism, first-person narratives and detailed descriptions of contemporary life came easy to them. However, while it rejected dogmas, young Soviet poetry and prose often also tended to lose clear sight of the values they affirmed and their country's historical prospects. The discovery of a complex world in which much was beyond the individual's control caused them to doubt their capabilities, like Hamlet had once done, and to ponder fundamental questions on the purpose of existence.

Many writers in the 50s felt that they were merely settling accounts with phenomena of the recent past. However, these fierce polemical debates were, in fact, covering up the deep so-

cial changes connected with the transition from the epoch in which socialism was established to that of its development on its own basis. After all the trials and tribulations of the transitional period, the literature and art of the developed socialist society started out on a new course.

NOTES

1. V. I. Lenin. *Selected Works,* vol. III, Progress Publishers, Moscow, p. 678.
2. Vissarion Belinsky. *Complete Works,* vol. VI, Moscow, USSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1955, p. 34 (in Russian).
3. Hegel. *Ästhetik,* Bd. 1, S. 188.
4. Ibid., Bd. 1, S. 188.
5. Valentin Ovechkin. *Articles. Diaries. Letters,* Moscow, Sovietsky Pisatel Publishers, 1972, p. 234 (in Russian).
6. Ibid., p. 214.

Chapter Four

MULTINATIONAL SOVIET LITERATURE

It is now time to think about what Soviet literature is like today.

By contemporary Soviet literature we mean, first and foremost, the literature of a developed socialist society, a literature which has already existed for just over two decades. And it is important to decide how to approach a discussion on literature at its present stage and how to cope with the difficulties which arise from the vast amount of factual material.

When speaking of the first stage in the history of Soviet literature as a time distinguished by a certain degree of unity we do not imply that there had been much similarity between the 20s and 30s, and between the 30s and 40s. During these decades literature developed and changed in a particularly intensive and rapid manner. Its unity throughout this entire historical epoch was reflected primarily in the stable tendencies which ran right through the period from the 20s to the 40s. Soviet literature was gradually becoming ideologically united and step by step the dozens of national literatures were uniting into a community, the like of which had never been seen before. A profound aesthetic reorientation came about in the arts based on the revival of the principles of epic art and affirmation of the Party spirit in literature and its affinity with the people. In view of this, it would be logical to examine the development of literature in chronological periods.

The literature of the 60s to the 80s is also united in a complex dynamic manner and permeated with ideological and creative tendencies that run right through the entire period. However, the dynamics of literary changes is less evident than in the epoch

of socialist construction or, at any rate, not so great as to warrant an examination of contemporary literature by decades.

As a rule, scientists prepare the material they are to study, and then dissect it into separate elements. And as in this case it is no good dissecting the period into "horizontal", temporal planes, we shall have to select "vertical", thematic ones instead. We must, however, bear in mind the fact that such a division made for conveniency's sake is somewhat arbitrary.

So what are the most important tendencies in the choice of problems and themes examined by the literature at this period?

In recent decades the historical novel has come to the fore again. Writers (and readers) are deeply interested in events of the remote past which have left their imprint on the formation of the Russian, Ukrainian, Georgian, Kazakh and other peoples. However, in this study I consider it more essential to discuss books about events of the relatively recent past, such as the revolution, the socialist construction and the Second World War. It is interesting to examine how these books compare to the ones we have already mentioned and how the past epoch is seen from the point of view of today.

Then we shall explore works on contemporary themes. This type of literature is extremely diverse in all respects, including the problems and themes it deals with. Of course, it is impossible to examine them all but if we were to choose the most important, we would certainly pick out at least three different trends: literary works on village life, prose and drama on industrial topics and, finally, literature on people's private everyday lives. Each of these "sections" of the contemporary literary process will enable one to gain an idea of the differences and common features of the literature during the 20s to the 40s and that of today, and to examine certain important questions of the literary process as a whole.

The brief study of the literature of developed socialism will be completed by a section on the dialectic of unity and difference whose primary aim will be to compare these two stages in Soviet literature's development.

One last point I should like to make is that the evolution of Soviet literature during the 20s to the 50s has been examined on the basis of books written by *Russian* writers. I felt it was

possible to confine myself to such a study because at that time it was Russian literature that embodied the most characteristic features of the literary developments which were going on throughout the country. Today Soviet literature is advancing on the basis of the close contacts and mutual enrichment of dozens of national literatures. Works of importance for the progress of socialist culture may appear (and do actually appear) in any of the languages of the peoples of the USSR. Thus, we shall be selecting books written in different languages to examine the specific features of literature today.

1. "IN TWO DIMENSIONS..."

Why are our writers, and particularly our writers of the older generation, so attracted by an epoch which is already over?

Of course, first and foremost, because that epoch had the greatest impact on the country's life and on the fates of the people world over. Looking back at that epoch after a fair amount of time, we find that it contains everything: devastating world wars, unparalleled in history, a revolution which drew a distinct line between the past and the future, and events in popular life that were full of unequalled drama. That epoch is receding further and further into the past but the vast range of human emotions which seethed and reverberated most loudly in it, are still felt today. And time and again we re-experience the selfless aspirations to the future, so typical of people in those days, the happiness of self-fulfilment in the struggle for great social goals, the fury of class battles, the sorrow of defeat and joy of victory.

Let us not forget that art in general tends to be attracted to a heroic state of the world. In order to retain the right to directly represent the ideal (in the aesthetic sense) relations between man and the world, artists, as Hegel had noted long ago, gladly returned to the legendary times when sovereign states were only just taking shape, and preferred to place their heroes in time of civil strife and revolution. In other words, in times when man had dealings with socio-historical circumstances which had not yet become firmly established and were actually being formed

at that point with his participation, in times when, together with all the people, he had to solve the most complex problems of world importance.

Contemporary Soviet literature has two thematic mainstays—the past and the present. What's more, the "historical" theme (I use inverted commas because works about the recent past are often written by eye-witnesses of the events) is firmly in the lead in so far as the quality of the social content and quantity of major epic works are concerned. At times, this section of literature becomes more popular than any other among the reading public. Such has been the case in recent years with books about the Great Patriotic War.

Our main problem is understanding how the time described in these books and the time in which they were written have been fused together, and discerning the nature of a phenomenon, which Yulia Drunina, a poetess of the front-line generation, wrote about thus:

I am living, it seems, in two dimensions:
In the seventies and in forty-one...

The early 1900s. The boundless Kazakh steppe with its sparsely scattered little villages, and the tiny dark figure of a fisherman on the dazzlingly white Aral Sea. "He was alone here, on the ice-bound sea. He did not seem to notice the other fishermen: all he was aware of was his usual work, the sky overhead, and his thoughts. And he was thinking that he was all alone, not just here on the ice but also in all his life..."

Thus unhurriedly begins the trilogy of the Kazakh writer Abdizhamil Nurpeisov *Blood and Sweat* (1961-1970). The writer gradually introduces us to the life of a people who is scattered across the steppe, tied fast to flocks of sheep and herds of horses, and doubly oppressed by its rich landowners and servitors of the Russian tsar. Summer follows winter and winter summer, the sun's fiery ball rises and sets in the dusty haze of the steppes and deserts, and life flows on just as it has done for generations upon generations, keeping people chained to their ancient customs, habits, confining them within the narrow circle of their personal interests. "They used to speak about eternal things:

about how the ice that year was freezing late, about how there were less fish and how hard it was to catch it in cold weather, and about how the weather was seldom fine. They could talk like this for hours, every day, all life long because this was what mattered most to them, and their fathers before them and their children after them. . ."

Blood and Sweat is about the fate of a small people during the socialist revolution. And like other such novels, it could not appear directly after the revolution. Several decades were needed for the revolution's significance in the destiny of the Kazakh people to be fully understood, for countless changes to take place in their land, for their century-old cultural backwardness to be overcome and for the people of herdsmen and nomads to give birth to writers with a broad social outlook and a modern creative cast of mind.

Nurpeisov's trilogy is reminiscent of the epic of the revolution which was created in Russian literature during the 20s and 30s. Tracing life and reflecting the real dialectics of the awakening of popular consciousness, the Kazakh writer naturally took into account Sholokhov's experience of re-creating such a process. The reader is first introduced to the routine, leisurely centuries-old way of life; then this life is set in motion and begins to change; finally, events of an unprecedented nature befall the people, leading them outside the sphere of their customary interests and involving them in the stormy historical events.

Yelaman, the trilogy's man hero, was orphaned as a young boy, when an old *murza* by the name of Tanirbergen killed his father. For seven years he tended the horses of another *murza* but when the latter started whipping him, he galloped off straightaway, taking nothing with him. Then he worked as a fisherman for a Russian merchant by the name of Fedorov. For a long time he put up with the latter's cruelty and greed like the others but when the merchant's avarice brought the fishermen's undoing, he could take no more and avenged himself. He was condemned to penal servitude. Then he served at the Turkish front during World War I. When he got back home, he started working with some Russians at a railway depot. During the Civil War he mustered a Kazakh cavalry detachment and began fighting on the side of the Reds. This is how Yelaman came to struggle for

his people's new life. It was a long and hard journey, which was by no means over because on one of the trilogy's last pages we read: "Much of what went on in this world was beyond his understanding."

This trilogy showing how the fate of one man and that of the entire people interacted at a sharp turning-point in history is a talented epic work directly continuing the traditions of Soviet literature in the 20s to the 40s.

In his novel *Salt Valley* (1968) Sergei Zalygin dealt with the history of the Civil War in Siberia. He chose a most interesting situation, which was epic by its very nature: the life of the people after the tsarist regime had already been overthrown but before the new Soviet power had become fully established. Moscow is a long way off and there are enemies all around. And an independent peasants' republic is formed in Salt Valley, which becomes like an island in a stormy sea. The peasants who pick out leaders from their midst, people with remarkable personalities such as Meshcheryakov and Brusenkov, are searching for the way to a new life.

This novel, however, differs in many instances from the epic works of the 20s. It is as if we were being shown a film in slow motion through a magnifying glass: against a stark backcloth of outward events we are presented with a profound study of the peasantry's spiritual quests in the extreme conditions of a turning-point in history. Whereas some writers used to poeticise anarchic communities rejecting all forms of authority, Zalygin poeticises the people's spontaneous movement towards the ideals of the new system which testified to the deep-rooted character of the socialist revolution.

It is interesting to note how even the peasants' way of thinking has changed in books that are separated by half a century. In Vsevolod Ivanov's novella *Partisans* we read that the peasants had been used for centuries to thinking only about farming and the land and therefore found it very hard now to concentrate their thoughts on problems of an entirely different nature. Zalygin's peasants, rustic philosophers, think and speak much more freely when discussing issues of the new state system. Seeing the events in historical perspective, the writer focuses his attention on the seeds of future conflicts which can be found in

the clash between harsh, authoritarian Brusenkov and democratic Meshcheryakov, who has the practical mind of a peasant.

The two-part work of the Byelorussian writer, Ivan Melezh, *People of the Marsh* and *The Breath of Thunder* (1961-1965) is known under the title of *The Polesye Chronicle*. Polesye is a low-lying marshy area in Byelorussia which, like the rest of the country, was radically changed with the introduction of collectivisation in the late 20s and early 30s. The reader is not likely to forget the simple village lad, Vasil Dyatel, who puts his heart and soul into the tiny plot of land he has just been issued, only to have it taken away in the end. He is also bound to remember the dreams and plans of Mikanor, the first chairman of the local agricultural artel, and the deep reflections and numerous concerns of Apeika, the chairman of the village executive council. Melezh's novel is an epic which has slowed down its rapid pace to take a closer look at people's faces and their complex life stories, which are often not at all typical in a sociological sense. Here again we have an epic situation but one that is presented in a "denser" and more multifaceted manner because the sharp contours of the epos have been filled in with the subtle details of socio-psychological analysis.

One of the most important works of the 70s was the novel of the Lithuanian writer Jonas Avyžius *The Lost Home* (1973) about the fate of a small nation, the Lithuanians, in the vortex of the Second World War.

Soviet power had existed in Lithuania for only a short while before the war when German mechanised troops rolled through the republic from west to east. The fascist "new order" with all its attributes was installed. Like all his compatriots, history schoolmaster Gediminas Džiugas had to decide how to act under the circumstances. He sees Marius going off to join a partisan detachment, and Adomas who has agreed to collaborate with the occupationists. As if to confuse him still more, they both consider that they are serving their nation. At first Gediminas sides with the people who hope to quietly survive the troubled time by remaining neutral in the battle between the great powers, between two irreconcilable social forces. Although he realises that this is wrong, the writer, nevertheless, refrains from didactic moralising and does not attempt to artificially put his hero back on the right

course. Deciding who you are with is difficult and at times agonising, both for the individual and for the people as a whole. Here is one of Gediminas' arguments with someone who has already firmly decided where he belongs:

" '...You mean the war hasn't taught you to tell the victim from a murderer?' Marius cried hotly.

" '...No, it has only proved to me quite conclusively that we are all both victims and murderers.'

" '...Well, well, why go so far? Yourself, I'm sure, you want to exclude from this jolly company?'

" 'I try my best, Marius. But in this infernal cauldron where you and I are boiling just now, everything's arranged in such a way that you'll become a murderer without wanting to kill. An involuntary murderer and, of course, a victim, too.' "

The writer, living "in two dimensions", creates an epic but one in which, contrary to the rules, the hero's inner life does not recede into the background and, what's more, becomes the work's pivot. We are presented with an epic situation conveyed by means of an inner monologue. The novel is epic as well as socio-psychological and philosophical. It gives, besides, a profound description of the Lithuanian people's mores and habits.

Perhaps the most significant work ever written in contemporary Soviet literature about the past war is Konstantin Simonov's trilogy *The Living and the Dead* (1959-1971). The broad objective view of the war, brilliantly reflected in this book from a contemporary standpoint, is unequalled. The three parts of the novel about the events of 1941, 1943 and 1944 convey the changing atmosphere of the people's life and enable one to better appreciate how Soviet people inwardly matured and learnt to fight more adeptly and how and why the front-line at first retreated as far as the Volga and then resolutely began to move westwards. The novel's action begins and ends in the same place, on the border of Russia and Byelorussia where Simonov was himself when the war broke out and where, at his own request, his ashes were scattered after his premature death.

I have only briefly touched upon a few books about the past epoch, but this short survey affirms the fact that the most prominent works of contemporary Soviet literature have as their subject-matter events of the first half of the century. It can be

said that it is namely these themes which are most epic in character. It is another matter that this epic differs from the one which was created from within an epic state of the world. The epic qualities of contemporary books are more complex and indirect, and more often than before conveyed by means of socio-psychological realism.

If a heading was needed for the next few pages, it might best be expressed by the words "one man still counts". I shall now be discussing books which concentrate on an analysis of one person and his behaviour in a critical situation.

An indispensable feature of the epic situation is "man's identity with himself and with his goal" (Hegel)[1] which is associated with the fact that there are periods when general tasks and the demands of the time also become highly personal, individual ones. Here is what the eminent Russian writer and public figure Alexander Herzen had to say on this subject: "There are epochs when man is free to express himself in the common cause. The activity towards which any energetic person strives then coincides with the aspirations of the society in which he lives. At such times, which are also quite rare, everything is caught up in the vortex of events, living, suffering, rejoicing and perishing in it... There is then no need to speak of self-sacrifice and loyalty to a cause—all that is done is done on impulse and with the greatest ease though to onlookers, actions which are the simple execution of will, the natural way of behaving, seem like self-surrender."[2]

This freedom to express oneself in the common cause, which in the literature of the 20s-40s was an integral part of the picture of the world shaken by unprecedented events, is now frequently focused on by writers.

An elevated poetic image of a Soviet woman is created in Vitali Zakrutkin's novella *The Saintly Mother* (1969). The word "Soviet" is imperative here because the actions of a woman all alone on a farmstead which has been razed to the ground by the Germans, cannot be explained simply in general human terms. For an understanding of the work one has to know that Maria is the wife of a Communist, that she is a collective-farm milkmaid who is respected by one and all and that the described events

take place after a few happy years during which people had cut off the shackles of dire need and begun to reap the benefits of collective work.

The war swept over the remote steppe farmstead like a devastating tornado, and then headed east, leaving alive only a defenceless pregnant woman. She settled down in a cellar which had remained intact and salvaged a few things from the charred ruins. All the domestic animals which had not been killed sought refuge with her as she was the only living person they could find. The collective-farm fields all around were unharvested. She realised that she could last out the winter, waiting for Soviet troops to arrive and preparing for the birth of her child, but she could not stop wondering whether she was right to lead what she considered an egoistic life at the time of a great national disaster.

"No... I couldn't live like this. Let's suppose I sit it out here like a vixen in a lair, have my baby and live off the fat of land free, lasting out till our troops get here. But when they arrive, they're bound to ask how I, a foremost collective-farm milkmaid, wife of Ivan, a collective-farm Communist who was executed by the enemy, and mother of Vasyatka, a heroic Pioneer who was killed with his father, spent my time here. How could I have forgotten about others and thought only of myself?.."

She is still plagued by doubts but her toil-worn hands are already at work. She fits herself out with a soldier's greatcoat, which has been shot through, and some old German boots, and sets off into the fields. She gathered the beets, sunflowers, maize and potatoes into piles and then dragged them under cover on a tarpaulin. "She worked without rest, come rain or shine, hurrying to gather in as much as possible so as to save at least part of what had been sown and planted by her team that spring. On cold days her hands and feet froze and her lips chapped and sometimes bled. More than once she cried from pain and self-pity, calling herself a mad fool and almost decided to give it all up and make the stove really hot instead, and never again leave her snug warm den, but she did not stop working."

Ever since Defoe's immortal novel, it has been a literary tradition to put man to the test of loneliness. Here, too, we have a

Robinson Crusoe of a kind, showing even more vividly Soviet man's collectivist instincts, which have been developed by the new system, and his moral principles reflecting his concern for the common good.

Maria began looking after seven waifs. After getting their strength back, the older ones helped her work in the snow-bound fields. Then towards spring she gave birth to a baby boy.

"We caught sight of her as soon as we started crossing the stream, overgrown with short reeds. She was standing on a hill slope with a baby in her arms, barefooted, her hair loose. Children, cows, sheep and hens were crowding round her. Spotting us, some bay horses began neighing shrilly and some white-winged doves soared upwards." The regimental commander rode towards the hill, dismounted and knelt down before Maria, pressing his cheek against her calloused hand.

The writer is not worried about a possible analogy with the Bible. On the contrary, he encourages it by saying that it was the carved image of the Madonna with a babe in arms standing in a niche which made him recall Maria. "But aren't there mothers on earth who have suffered more terrible blows of fate than the ones you did?"

The war novellas of Vasil Bykov, the Byelorussian writer, are mostly about man who in a highly dramatic situation is forced to make a fundamental choice and define his moral standpoint. Unlike Zakrutkin's *The Saintly Mother*, his depiction contains no romantic elements. He is sparing in his use of epithets and avoids romantic symbolics: he firmly relies on the fact that his objective stark narrative will itself lead the reader to the right conclusions.

November 1941. Fascist troops in a constant stream are moving east towards Moscow. Hiding by a roadside, Lieutenant Ivanovsky, the commander of a group of scouts and hero of Bykov's novella *To Live Until Dawn* (1972), bitterly watches them moving. Ivanovsky has volunteered to go on a raid into the enemy's rear in order to destroy a German artillery base which they have located. "It can easily be blown up or burnt," Ivanovsky overconfidently promised the general who had shown interest in his report. But to his horror the base had disappeared and all that was left of it was a number of stakes sticking out of the ground

around a clearing. It looked like witchcraft but it was not. "It was the bitter truth, yet another of the many calamities which had befallen him in his ill-fated lot during this war."

He had to decide what to do next. Recovering from his shock and confusion after a few minutes, he sent back the remaining men in his group and stayed behind with one other to look for the ill-starred base although there was practically no chance he would succeed. "He could not go back with nothing, that was beyond him." Now "his honour as a commander was particularly at stake and he felt that the outcome of this duel with the Germans depended almost entirely on him alone." After separating from the group "he would from now on act at his own peril..."

Another lieutenant by the name of Travkin (in Emmanuil Kazakevich's novella *Star,* written shortly after the war) led his group into the enemy's rear in almost the same manner. And this group likewise met a tragic end. However, Travkin and his comrades lost their lives, knowing that the information they had gained would be of service to their cause. Indeed, it was so important that it travelled straight to the Soviet High Command, and threw the German headquarters into panic. Somewhere near the end of the novella we read: "The ripples around Travkin grew wider and wider, sending waves across the earth all the way to Berlin and Moscow."

Unfortunately, this was not the case with Lieutenant Ivanovsky, who did not manage, as he had hoped, to make a firework display of the advancing German troops' ammunition. The last witness, who could get back to base and tell the others about what had happened to him, was killed. He did not even have the chance of "dying a heroic death" (Furmanov), with many people watching his last moments, like Sotnikov, the hero of one of Bykov's other novellas. Ivanovsky, however, was condemned to go missing and die all alone of his wounds and exposure on a cold, black November night near Smolensk, which had been captured by the enemy.

But when he was almost dead, he suddenly heard a vehicle's engine somewhere nearby. "This unexpected happening stirred his almost blank mind; a new longing filled his being, contradicting his feelings. He stopped thinking about his misfortune,

pulled himself together, and in angry desperation concentrated all his efforts on his goal—the last goal of his life."

It took Ivanovsky superhuman efforts to crawl to the road, and take up a fighting position in a snowy rut for the last time, and, more importantly, keep the spark of life burning inside him to last out this endless night. "He had no hope really, he just did not want to die for nothing, to freeze to death on this ghastly road. If only he lived until dawn! If only he lived to see a German car coming his way!"

Ivanovsky was dogged by bad luck to the very end. An Opel carrying a German general did not come his way. In fact, not even an ordinary lorry carrying enemy troops drove along that road in the early morning. Two or, to be more precise, one German transport driver came up to Ivanovsky lying prostrate on the snow, while the other stayed put in the cart at a distance. And now there was nothing else to expect. "In any case, there will be nothing more for him in this life. He carried out his last service to his Motherland, doing his duty as a soldier."

Timorous steps were heard. A shot rang out sending one more bullet into his wounded, frozen and tormented body. And making a supreme effort, the lieutenant began slowly turning over onto his side, trying to release his grenade's catch. "He, of course, would vanish in only a few seconds and then he would rest in eternal peace. In his position now this was even enticing as he would at once be delivered from all his sufferings. But others would remain after him and they would win and cultivate this wonderful verdant land, living purposeful and rewarding lives. But who knows, perhaps their great future will depend on the death of the twenty-two-year-old platoon commander Lieutenant Ivanovsky on this road."

Here is what the author has to say about his work: "As far as *To Live Until Dawn* and the portrait of its main hero Lieutenant Ivanovsky are concerned, I was interested, first and foremost, in the extent of human responsibility... Nobody is to blame for Ivanovsky's death: he chose such a lot himself because he had high moral principles which did not allow him to resort to cunning or deceit in matters of either great or little consequence..."[3]

In order to show Bykov's attitude to the hero of his novella, I have referred to an interview with the writer. However, in the

case of Daniil Granin's novella *Klavdia Vilor* (1976), there is no need for me to do so. Having set himself the task of "reducing... invention to zero", the author is present on almost every page of the narrative. He accompanies the descriptions with his ows observations and ponders on the character and conduct of the real-life heroine of his novella.

Klavdia Vilor had an incredibly hard life. However, like Lieutenant Ivanovsky, she certainly cannot be called a victim of circumstance. Everything that happened to her during the war is ultimately the result of her own choice and character.

Klavdia was ten at the time of the October Revolution. She was one of the millions of people who were fascinated by the idea of the world's social remaking and who themselves formed part of this powerful process, resolutely solving one most complex historical task after another. She took on a new surname formed from the initials of the words Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Organiser of the Revolution. In the grim year of 1942, she succeeded in getting enlisted in the army, where she served as a political instructor at a military school and not as a nurse or a liaison officer, as was usual for a woman. "There was nothing she could do when one night the school was sent off to the Stalingrad front but, frankly, she did not intend to do anything about it, as she was longing to get to the front."

The only fact that can be put down to blind fate is that she was wounded in both legs in her very first battle. But what could the young recruits covering one of the break-throughs in the front-line, do against the powerful and still confident fascist shock troops who were headed east towards Stalingrad and the Volga? Many were killed and some, including political instructor Klavdia Vilor, were taken prisoner.

The first part of Klavdia Vilor's difficult odyssey took place in concentration camps and prisons.

How should you behave when machine-guns are being aimed at you from watch-towers and when you are being interrogated and about to face certain death? Everyone decided this for himself, and so did Klavdia Vilor, although, strictly speaking, it was all her past life that decided it for her. "Now she had to live up to all the lofty words she had ever spoken..." And she did not simply bear herself with dignity: she acted boldly and de-

fiantly, provoking the nazis' wrath, and causing them to wonder at the character of a Bolshevik commissar.

She was beaten and taken out to sham executions but as soon as she rallied slightly, she would start singing patriotic songs as loudly as possible for all the prison to hear. She was interrogated with all the fascists' notorious means of torture. And whenever she was alone with her brutal interrogators or among the other prisoners, she would repeat: "But Stalingrad's still holding out!" "Nobody understood why she did it, why she asked for trouble, and goaded them into torturing and beating her. Neither did they understand that Stalingrad was the source of her strength. She would keep going as long as Stalingrad did. This was her own front and she had to stick it out just like Stalingrad."

Then, after escaping, she spent many long months wandering across the land which had been occupied by the nazis. She could either hide in some remote village and wait for the Soviet troops to arrive or do everything in her power to see that they came as quickly as possible. And again, of the two choices open to her, she chose the more difficult.

"She was alone among these farmsteads and villages, alone in the sense that nobody demanded anything of her. If she decided upon a course of action, it was entirely up to her... All she had left was a spark of life and a sense of purpose. And she wandered from house to house, repeating over and over again that we will win a victory. She had no facts, information or proof of this but revived the secret hopes which every people always has in a calamity. In some ways she resembled the maternal figure, which Victory is by no means fortuitously portrayed as..."

Some works are totally immersed in the past, revealing this past through its inner movement. In such cases signs of our time are, as it were, dissolved in the fictional narrative. Granin's novella *Klavdia Vilor* belongs to a different type of literature in which the two ages are linked directly. The writer studies the past from the point of view of the present, trying to understand how characters and circumstances interacted in the conditions of an epic state of the world and what made people undertake what seemed like completely impossible tasks.

"Much of what happened in the war," writes Granin, "now

seems beyond understanding. It seems unbearable. It seems beyound belief, even from the viewpoint of purely physiological resources, that the human spirit and body could have accomplished it... There is a sufficiently large number of destinies like this for us to look upon the miracle of the human spirit as a miracle, an incredible, unbelievable, inexplicable miracle."

This is one aspect of the matter. The other has to do with the logic of people's conduct which is not so easy to understand and reconstruct in different social conditions. In his account of Klavdia Vilor's hard mission, the author writes that "she continued to act ruthlessly". She called for all collaboration with the nazis, whatever form it might take, to cease, even when it meant possibly surviving and saving old people and children from starvation. For her it was better to die than collaborate whether voluntarily or not with the fascists. Her ruthlessness, resoluteness and obsession even amazes Klavdia Vilor today. But that is how it was (as I have already said this book is about a real person).

And it is not something incidental but an integral part of the time with its special social and moral demands.

This way in which time, past and present, is directly connected in fictional works, and reality reflected "in two dimensions", is characteristic of the literature of the 60s to the 80s. Examples of this are Oles Honchar's *The Cyclone,* Leonid Pervomaisky's *Wild Honey,* Ivan Shamyakin's *An Open Heart,* Paul Kuusberg's *One Night,* Anatoly Ananyev's *Milestones of Love,* Ales Adamovich's *The Story of Khatin,* Yuri Bondarev's *The Shore* and *The Choice,* Yuri Trifonov's *The Old Man.* Let us now look more closely at some of these works.

Yuri Bondarev's novel, *The Shore* (1975) has an unusual composition. Here we have a graphic novella about the war "inscribed" in a book about the present. The first part of the book tells of the visit of two Soviet writers, Nikitin and Samsonov, to West Germany. Then comes a separate narrative in which Nikitin recalls the last days of the war. Finally, we return to West Germany again and to the writers' debate with their German colleagues in front of a large audience. The novel ends with a description of Nikitin's death on his way home (which is how the somewhat vague "open" ending can be understood).

"I hate war," says Nikitin, "but sometimes I really do miss the people I met at the war, all of them I knew, both good and bad. And it's not at all easy to explain why. Maybe because no matter what we were like as people, we all needed each other very badly, like brothers, say, in a big family... It's a nostalgic feeling typical of our generation. See what I mean?"

May 1945 symbolises youth and victory for Nikitin. Nobody who fought in the great battle could forget the day towards which they had been heading through insurmountable obstacles and terrible ordeals for almost four years. However, what is the most important part of this nostalgia is the sense of direct involvement in the course of history, of responsibility for the fate of mankind and man's graphic self-expression in the struggle for the common cause of his people.

For Nikitin the exalted time of the war of liberation was most fully personified in the character and outward features of Lieutenant Knyazhko, who was always neat, perfectly controlled and always acted on his principles. "In his presence Nikitin always felt as if a gentle and fresh breeze was blowing over him; it seemed to be coming from his voice, his gaze and everything about his spruce figure." And his image would haunt Nikitin to the very end of his life. "Never again have I met anyone like him, and I still miss him to this very day."

Pondering over why men like Ksyazhko are no longer to be found, Nikitin comes to the rather naive conclusion that "others like him lost their lives as a rule". However, be that as it may, life itself has given the writer Nikitin a vivid example of a man who may be used as a yardstick of human dignity. And this has left its mark on his attitude to himself and to others and to his creative quest of many years which we have divined.

The present is seen from a special angle in Bondarev's novel. The only thing that can be said about it with complete certainty is that it has become much more complex than a quarter of a century ago. "In '45 I believed that everything would change after the war, that the whole world and all life would be one long holiday. But in '46 and '49 I no longer thought like this."

What has made Nikitin as he is now? Life which has by no means "became kinder and simpler"? The death of his son? "With him I lost half of what made up my life. Was it then I

lost confidence in the finality of truth?" Events in the world which have not lived up to his optimistic expectations?

In *The Shore* we become aware, first and foremost, of the general state of the world, which is split in two by opposing systems and at the same time joined into a single "metasystem" which in the 20th century is passing through a difficult, hazardous and dramatic phase of its development. And Samsonov's rigid set of ideas, which has been preserved from the past, is no longer of any use for understanding this world. The entire content of the novel points to the fact that Nikitin's complex, dramatic perception of the world and his rejection of all pretense as if he held the keys to all the enigmas of being, correspond to an immeasurably greater extent to the state of the world as it really is today. This way of thinking and cognising the world does not save anyone from mistakes and errors but only it, as Nikitin and the author, who has much in common with him, are deeply convinced, enables one to advance by assimilating the world and searching for the answers to the complex questions of the time.

While unanimously applauding *The Shore,* Soviet criticism also noted that the strata of the past and present in the novel were at times too far apart. "On the one hand, we undoubtedly have an epic intention: the linking of history and the present, of an individual's and a nation's fate... On the other, *The Shore* is highly lyrical and intimate in its intense romantic plot..."[4] There is, indeed, a conflict between the genres in Bondarev's novel: the confession in it is inscribed in the epic, while the epic events are depicted in a highly lyrical key. But is it really the author who is to blame for these incongruities and not the "variegation" of the strata of time depicted by him?

The complex literary task of finding a single aesthetic key to the depiction of the past and the present is faced by every writer attempting to join both these stages of history in his book. In his own way, the Ukrainian writer Oles Honchar also tried to solve this problem in his novel *The Cyclone* (1970).

Cameraman Sergei Tanchenko and script-writer Kolosovsky are hunting for ideas for a new film. They have already looked through and rejected a whole pile of scripts at the studios. They

finally decide to make a film about the ordeals of wartime. And so we are, as it were, presented with the script of the future film interspersed with Tanchenko's and Kolosovsky's observations.

Then the shooting of the film is interrupted by a natural calamity, a flood during which the entire crew has to display courage and selflessness.

The device chosen by the author enables him not only to present pictures of the past but also to express his attitude to it, interpret it from the point of view of the present, thus outlining more effective principles of its artistic depiction.

The film-makers foresee that they are likely to be accused of returning yet again to the past but they are prepared to argue their case: there is no such thing as a purely contemporary theme. The present, they assent, is always permeated with the past.

Tanchenko and Kolosovsky wish to present a broad, almost cosmic scheme in their film: a blood-stained planet enveloped in the flames of a devastating war. They also want to make a most thorough analysis of the workings of the human soul. "Raging calamities, terrible discords—that's what we've got to concentrate on..." They intend to show "...human beings in their soaring flight and their fall, in greatness and baseness, in death agonies and weeping the happy tears of victors". How are we to connect these two different ages? This question is posed by the book's main characters. They decide they should not be afraid to use conventions and symbols to show time's continuity.

Soviet troops suffer a heavy defeat at Kharkov. The camp fires of the vast encirclement are burning low. Kholodnaya Gora, the camp for prisoners-of-war in the town centre, now overflowing, symbolises captivity, cruelty, stoicism and resistance. "...Day by day our strength drains out of us. We are wasting away. Our ribs jut out more sharply, and beards grow. Soon we shall be like that dried-up human skeleton who sits before us, doubled up, in the heat of the prison platz and weeps in quiet hopelessness." In this hell, right from the heat of battle, appears a Caucasian by the name of Shamil, who has demonstratively left his Order of Lenin on his blood-stained field-shirt. The other prisoners save him from what seems like certain death.

" '...I would like my camera to show at this point the inner

monolithic strength of man,' said Sergei, the cameraman, when we were discussing this part. 'There was something—let's call it the light of ideals—which held you up in that hell. . .' "

Reshetnyak, Kolosovsky and Shamil are transferred from the camp to work on an estate, which has been set up by the fascists. Here, too, is captivity where they suffer daily indignities and ordeals aimed at eradicating all their human qualities. However, the occupationists fail to achieve their ends. There begins a secret armed fight against the nazis and their local henchmen. Reshetnyak is at last reunited with his beloved Katrya whom he has hoped to see ever since he was taken prisoner, and Shamil and Prisia fall deeply in love.

Such is the past in Honchar's novel. Besides being sufficiently real and dramatic, it is also "modernised" thanks to a purposeful artistic selection taking place before us of angles, scenes and details, and evaluated from a considerable historical distance.

The writer's creative intent to show, first and foremost, the links of time and continuity of the generations, is clearly evident. And our time is presented in the book in such a way that it harmonises as much as possible with the heroic past. There is no trace here of the routine of everyday life as we know it now. The profession of the film-makers, the novel's heroes, is hard and romantic in its own way. To crown it all, their lives are interrupted by a violent Atlantic cyclone.

One of the heroes fighting the elements is Captain Reshetnyak, Ivan's and Katrya's son. The actress playing the part of Prisia in the film, saves the children who have been caught in the flood. Cameraman Sergei Tanchenko loses his life while filming scenes of the struggle against the cyclone. "Despite everything, there really is continuity of humaneness in man. . . It's there, it lives, it comes out strongly in emergencies. Without it the world would be greatly impoverished."

In Honchar's novel there is no discrepancy between the lyrical and epic elements and the past and present are reflected from the same literary angle. However, the work's aesthetic unity is to a considerable extent attained by introducing into it extreme circumstances, which shatter people's lives, by deliberately levelling the two diverse states of the world and by uniting a social and natural cataclysm in the single image of the cyclone.

Yuri Trifonov chose his own way of studying the links between the past and present in his novel *The Old Man* (1978). The events of the Civil War are depicted without the slightest hint of romanticism in the novel and not only is there no attempt to level the two epochs but the present is deliberately shown in an unfavourable, mundane light.

An old age pensioner by the name of Pavel Letunov, who took part in the Civil War, is coming to the end of his life. He regards it as his last duty in this world to discover the truth in the affair of Sergei Migulin, a Red Army Commander, who many years ago was wrongly accused and then unjustly forgotten.

But who cares about the truth of the matter? It looks as if nobody does. At any rate, Pavel Letunov's children and the summer residents around him certainly do not. However, he cannot get the matter off his mind and blot out the ghosts of the past which haunt him day and night.

Migulin, one of the figures shaped by the stormy revolutionary epoch, was a Chapayev of the South, who inspired fear in the revolution's enemies. "What was he really like? Deuce knows, he was an odd fellow, and when you think you've got him summed up, something else about him makes you change your mind." By the press he is heralded as a hero, an invincible and invulnerable victor of the Don counter-revolution. But then: "Migulin is playing a double game! That's what they were saying in the Party committees, army headquarters and tribunals. But what evidence did they have? Again, something vague and hard to put into words. . ."

It is useless to judge the past only by today's standards. In some respects both epochs exist in different dimensions. And one not only has to penetrate into the depths of past decades but also to gain an understanding of the actions of people who are guided by different motives, some of which may now seem strange and inexplicable.

At the height of the Civil War Trotsky issued his provocative instructions according to which the Cossacks were to lose their national identity. "Lord, how few people were appalled and kicked up a fuss. Because when a volcano erupts the lava discharged may make you blind. And you can't breath in the infer-

nal heat. The earth is seething not just here, in our country, but all over the world..."

From now on it was forbidden to call oneself a Cossack: the stripes on uniform trousers were to be removed and local government was banned. "They'd taken it into their heads to change an entire people in three months... And all because of panic and fear and a feverish urge to change life once and for all!..."

Selected troops rode through the Cossack villages, confiscating property and meting out punishments with great relish. An active part in all this was played by commissars Logachev and Kharin who "were renowned for their firm, intrepid execution of such-like orders". "A deep silence descended. We had expected the world to erupt even before these petty local troubles brewed. All the revolutionaries and workers of the world were going to rise up as one man. How could it be otherwise? What else could have prevented us from seeing the light? That was our predicament and excuse." "It was a violent year, a violent hour for Russia. A violent time, gushing like lava and spewing fire. And something hitherto unknown and totally new was born of this fiery volcano."

This age gave birth to Migulin just as it had to a real person by the name of Mironov, the commander of the Second Cavalry Army, who was this literary hero's prototype. The time moulded a character that was sharp and unruly, frank and resolute in word and deed, capable of stirring the masses, and leading them to meet the enemy, and also the unknown future. However, as the author says in his novel, Migulin did not have someone like Furmanov (the commissar in Chapayev's division) beside him. And unlike Chapayev, he was of Cossack extraction and only a short while ago had held the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Cossack cavalry. What's more, the milieu in which he had to act, was immeasurably more complex and explosive. And then there were the drastic and impracticable instructions of Trotsky and other "accelerators" of the world revolution like him.

Mistrust or, rather, incomplete trust, envelops Migulin like a grey mist, follows him on even his most successful missions, and causes harsher and more stringent commissars to be sent to him. In the spring of 1919 Denikin attacked and an uprising flared up in the Don region but Migulin is summoned to Moscow and sent off to Smolensk. Then he is put in charge of a formation

but it is again withheld from the action. After a fierce "battle of telegrams" Migulin decides to make for the front-lines, thus disobeying orders. On the way he is arrested with a group of commanders who have remained loyal to him and sent off to prison. While awaiting trial, they sing rousing Cossack songs.

At the court-martial it appears that each side has its own truth. Prosecutor Yanson says: "We are trying here a criminal who gabbles about the happiness of mankind while letting Mamontov get through to Moscow. We must not show clemence to such people." To which Migulin's defense lawyer replies: "What can the accused actually be blamed of? He was a Red Army man, not a politician, and he inaccurately assessed the political situation and acted in a forthright manner as a soldier—that's all. He's a man of integrity and wears his heart on his sleeve."

And then Migulin himself says in his defense: "I wasn't against communism: I was against separate individuals who compromised the Soviet government by acting the way they did..." Alexander Danilov who had been a political prisoner under the tsar and was the only commissar Migulin could stand, had expressed his opinion of Migulin at an earlier date: "He's not an enemy, he really isn't. He's a revolutionary but a peasant, that is, a petty bourgeois one. And he's worth a lot to us because our enemies are his enemies, too..."

So who is Migulin, after all? "Goodness me, how impossible it is to sum him up in a couple of words. And that's precisely what people are always trying to do. They did so while he was alive, branding him as a 'traitor' and a 'saboteur', and do so now, calling him a 'Leninist' and 'revolutionary'. We've got to sort out all these contradictions, no matter how hard it is to understand, appreciate and evaluate all these events now, several decades later, in what seems like another life." "Things have all got so terribly muddled; everything that I've read and heard people saying and all the bits and pieces I still remember, and what I've made up, and what actually happened." Yes, the most difficult part of all is sorting out this jumble of information and finding out *what actually happened*. And this is one of the possible answers: "Migulin perished because at that crucial moment in time the Gods by mistake released and charged with tremendous power two currents of heat and cold, two vast clouds,

stretching over continents, namely, *faith* and *doubt,* and he was whirled away by a hurricane in which heat and cold, faith and doubt were all combined into one. . ."

Trifonov employs an unusual device: he examines the past through the prism of the memory. What's more, as is sometimes the case, the past seems more vivid and real to the old man than the present does. "The muffled voices of other people and his grandchildren in whose lives something was happening in the present, slowly came to the surface of his consciousness as if through a layer of water but Letunov paid no heed to them. Some things he had no idea of and others he guessed."

Then Letunov dies, taking his tormenting memory with him and leaving the drama of fifty years ago only half unravelled. It is possible the scores will finally be put right by the university post-graduate who has decided to write his thesis on Migulin. Letunov's son, Ruslan, has given him all his father's papers.

Of Trifonov's novel one may also say that the past and present run separately in it like two incompatible fluids. However, one simply cannot conclude that this result was unintentional. The writer was, in fact, studying precisely the "variegation" of different times, examining their correlation and looking for the reason to explain Migulin's fate in the unique characteristics of the social life of his time. In point of fact, what we have here is a narrative about a possible but unfulfilled epic hero, and he is such because too many unforeseen circumstances beyond his control intervened in his fate and also because the social and historical situation at the time proved too complex to be reduced to a single conflict.

I have already asked this question and I shall now ask it again: why are there so many works about the past? Because for many writers the stormy twenties, elevated and dramatic thirties, and fiery forties are the story of their lives, which nobody else could ever tell as well. Because by returning to "the morning of the new era" (Leonov), when a new social formation was being established, fictional writers, providing historical, sociological, and philosophical analyses in their works give themselves very great scope and are thus able to study the threads of historical continuity, and perceive the unique qualities of the epochs. What's

more, by penetrating the past they get a better perspective of the present and, on the contrary, in retrospect, see things in the past that were missed by contemporaries as they were hard to discern in the stormy events of the time. And finally because (this is the last point I'd like to emphasise) the model of future man is in many ways seen by our literature in the people and human relations of that epoch which gave rise to hitherto unknown purposefulness, self-sacrifice, perseverance and inner beauty.

One and the same time is depicted by *The Iron Flood, Salt Valley, And Quiet Flows the Don, The Old Man, Virgin Soil Upturned, People of the Marsh, The Unsubdued, The Lost Home, Rainbow* and *To Live Until Dawn...* Some of these books were written at a time when the world was in an exceptional, epic state and the others recently, quite some time after the events. What do these books, which are sometimes so different in form and content, actually have in common? And what is it about them that proves these books belong to different stages of social and literary development?

It seems to me that in the most general terms their common features may be expressed thus: our literature has always striven to study, express, and assimilate humanity's first priceless experience of transforming life on the basis of social justice, and to depict the life of the peoples inhabiting this vast country at a grand and difficult turning-point in its history. And in both cases we are dealing here with the books of writers who have openly chosen between two social systems and who affirm both ideologically and aesthetically the historical rightness of the socialist revolution, and the promising prospects and beauty of communist ideals.

It is more difficult to speak of their differences although they might seem quite obvious. This is because literature has always been extremely diverse and complex, raising objections to what would seem like the most self-evident postulates. Differences do exist between them but one has to be very careful about formulating them. One should proceed from the premise that different stages of the literary process are not sealed off from one another and that we are dealing with the development and enhancement of the traditions of Soviet classical literature and not with their rejection.

The first point that may be stated with complete confidence is that *the geographical origin of the fiction about the past has expanded to an extraordinary degree.* Peoples who previously had no written language have now acquired a literary language on a par with the times; the numerous national literatures have greatly improved and reached a new level of maturity, and everywhere writers have in one way or another answered their peoples' natural desire to look back into the recent past and see what they were like at a time of great changes and the most terrible ordeals. Of course, they produced works of differing quality, sometimes merely repeating earlier discoveries of other Soviet writers on the basis of local material. This, however, by no means throws doubt on the fact that the growth of the national literatures, which was much more steady than ever before, led to the creation of a wealth of splendid epics on the socialist reconstruction and Great Patriotic War, continuing the traditions of the 20s to the 40s and filling in the "gaps" left by the Soviet classics.

One other general conclusion seems indisputable to me, namely that *contemporary literature about the past has become much more diverse.* Creative tendencies which in the 20s to the 40s frequently were only outlined in individual works are now fully developed trends in contemporary literature, sometimes with offshoots of their own.

At its initial stage literature was not averse to unexpected twists in the action, introducing elements of the detective story and intense plots (Marietta Shaginyan's *Mess-Mend,* Bruno Yasensky's *Man Changes His Skin* and others). This line has also been greatly developed in contemporary literature. We now have numerous books about prominent revolutionaries that read like adventure stories and a whole series of works about Cheka workers (Ardamatsky's *Requital,* Semyonov's *No Password Is Needed, Diamonds for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat)* and about Soviet secret agents (Kozhevnikov's *The Sword and the Shield* and Semyonov's *Seventeen Moments of Spring*).

Documentary fiction was also produced in the 40s. However, what was then more of an exception, is now for a number of reasons one of the main trends in Soviet prose. Many works about Lenin are based on documents (Drabkina's *Brown Rusks,* Shaginyan's *Retracing Lenin's Steps,* Shatrov's *The Sixth of July*).

Documents and facts in their literary treatment have to a considerable extent determined the tone of the literature about the Great Patriotic War. Here belong Smirnov's *Heroes of Brest Fortress,* and *Stories about Unknown Heroes,* Simonov's *Various Days of the War,* Adamovich, Bryl and Kolesnik's *Out of the Fire,* and *The Book of the Blocade* by Adamovich and Granin.

At one time, works re-creating the events of the revolution, socialist reconstruction and the war were predominantly of an epic character. Much less influence was exerted by the "prosaic" trend in literature which treated the same subjects from a different angle. Among the latter are works such as Mikhail Bulgakov's *White Guard,* Konstantin Simonov's *Days and Nights,* Vera Panova's *The Train.* The situation is different in contemporary literature. The system of profound socio-psychological analysis, which has been elaborated and perfected by literature in order to interpret present-day reality, has also been widely used by writers to study the past. And this new approach has not only increased literature's research methods but also enabled writers to see new details, colours and facets of the past which had previously been passed over.

It is not, strictly speaking, a question of the artistic means and devices employed in such an analysis for they, too, were called into being by the development of society, the change in the historical situation and the considerable reorientation which took place in literature.

When the world was in an exceptional epic state, writers' attention was primarily focused on the epoch's main component forces: its crucial conflict, all-absorbing goal, ideal hero, and the predominant type of interaction between characters and circumstances. Everything less important was either altogether left out or remained in the background as faintly outlined characters and situations. Contemporary literature approaches this epoch from quite a different angle. The historical perspective, and a better understanding of the complex processes involved in man's remaking in the conditions of the new system made the events of the first half of the century into a truly boundless new field of study for literature. The works of the 60s and 70s have given us a really wide range of characters and diverse situations, circumstances

and conflicts in the past, the like of which could not have even been contemplated in the 20s to the 40s.

For obvious reasons only a few works have been mentioned here but even a brief analysis enables one to see how diverse writers' approaches were to the reflection of the epoch in which socialism was formed. We have here a very wide range of genres which can only be conveyed approximately by existing definitions: epic, lyrical epic, heroic-romantic, "panoramic" novels, journalistic fiction, historico-political, philosophical, documentary, adventure, socio-psychological and novels of everyday life... Almost identical situations are often interpreted in a different artistic manner (for example, the above-mentioned novellas of Zakrutkin, Bykov and Granin), and, on the contrary, the most diverse aspects and phenomena of the past epoch are sometimes treated in one and the same stylistic trend.

Does it follow from this that in fiction an epic situation may be conveyed by any means, including non-epic ones? Are the state of the world and the forms of its literary reflection totally independent of one another? Are there any boundaries, which cannot be crossed without, as a consequence, distorting the specific features of the age?

The experience accumulated by Soviet literature in the 60s and 70s provides a wealth of material for studying these problems. At any rate, I consider that two indisputable conclusions can be made. Firstly, that there is now great freedom of choice as far as the forms of the literary depiction of the past are concerned. And, secondly, that there are, nevertheless, objective limits to this freedom. These limits are felt when certain invisble laws governing the correlation of ages are transgressed, as a result of which perceptible contradictions arise between what is depicted and the method of depiction.

The literature of today dealing with the great social storms of the first half of our century is very diverse, and the survey I have carried out by no means covers all its distinctive features. However, if one had to single out the most characteristic and striking feature distinguishing it from the literature of previous decades, I would cite Zalygin's own appraisal of his novel *Salt Valley* and novella *On the Irtysh River*: "These works focus not so much on events as on psychological issues."[5] The feeling, which prompted

writers over and over again to return to this epoch, had nothing to do with an aspiration for bringing to light various forgotten or insufficiently well-known events and historical facts. What mattered most to them was to penetrate into the characters, feelings and thoughts of the people who took part in these events and, first of all, in the words of Zalygin again, to answer the questions "who?" and "how?" rather than "what?"

But does this then mean that the literature of the 20s to 40s tended to depict events in their surface value and ignore man's inner life? Or that contemporary literature has surpassed the Soviet classics and proved more humanist in comparison? These would be superficial and erroneous conclusions. At each of its new stages literature has specific creative tasks to solve, which are inherent in each given period. The main point to make here is that in the system of epic art which defined the face of the culture at a time when socialism was only just being established, the hero's activity was primarily extrovert by nature, and designed to transform his surroundings, and his inner life by comparison naturally receded into the background. And it is likewise in order that the literature of developed socialism, which is no longer dominated by epic art, has felt the need and been given the chance to study the inner world of the hero of that age and, what's more, to do so in a more thorough and careful manner, and without unnecessary hurry re-create his moral quests. Thus, it naturally gains in some ways and loses out in others.

2. BETWEEN THE TOWN AND THE VILLAGE

All over the world villages are turning into towns.

This universal and centuries-old process is governed by historical and social conditions and proceeds in its own way in different countries and continents.

A special and unique type of urbanisation has taken place in the Soviet Union. And this process has direct bearing on the character of the Soviet literature about the countryside in the past, present, and possibly in the future.

It is difficult to comprehend the scale of the changes which are taking place in Russian country life. For over a thousand years generations upon generations of Russian peasants passed on and inherited practically the same conditions of life, and hard, forced labour which was, however, closely bound to the earth and enhanced by secret joys of its own. The horse and wooden plough were an inalienable part of the peasant's life from time immemorial right up to the 1920s.

Even the belated advent of capitalism did not essentially change the way of life of the bulk of the Russian peasantry, especially not in the backwoods, and in no way altered the ratio between the urban and rural populations, the latter of which remained in an overwhelming majority. In 1913, 18 per cent of the entire population of the Russian Empire lived in towns and 82 per cent in villages. Notwithstanding all the stormy social events which swept over the country, this ratio stayed the same right up to 1926.

And then all of a sudden, like a slow-flowing river in a plain suddenly plunging downwards into a frothing, roaring waterfall, came five successive decades in the course of which the vast land of peasants disintegrated and the predominantly rural country became urbanised. In 1940, on the eve of the war, the village population in the Soviet Union accounted for 67 per cent of the population. In 1951, it was down to 60 per cent. The year 1961 was the only one in the country's history when the town and village population were more or less the same. However, the scales began tilting irrevocably in favour of the town. In 1974, the rural population was down to 40 per cent and in 1979, to 37 per cent...

A single generation witnessed the unparalleled historical change which took place along with the October Socialist Revolution, collectivisation and industrial transformation of the formerly backward country. At the turn of the century eight out of ten inhabitants lived in the countryside. Now, near the end of the century, the situation has almost reversed: seven out of ten live in the town.

How is this process reflected in contemporary literature? This is what we shall be discussing in the following section but first let's make a short excursion into the past.

Since time immemorial rural Russia occupied an immense area and was the cause of concern, alarm, sorrow and hope for the progressive-minded, educated sections of society. This Russia began where the outskirts of towns and fences of country estates ended. It seemed to be there for everyone to see but at the same time always had something strange and elusive about it.

Radishchev (who was exiled to Siberia at the end of the 18th century for his book *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*) was shaken to the bottom of his heart by the scale of the people's misery. Later, Karamzin, a writer and historian of the early 19th century, discovered that "even peasant women have feelings". The great reformer of Russian literature, Pushkin, created vivid pictures of popular life and laid the foundations of a realistic approach to village life. Turgenev added a graphic chapter to the discovery of a popular hero. Nekrasov not only reflected many aspects of the peasants' life but also poetically expressed their attitudes and their emotions. Gleb Uspensky left an analytical portrait of the Russian peasantry at the complex time when serfdom was being abolished. Throughout his long life Lev Tolstoy tried to be the mouthpiece of the people's cravings and aspirations...

I should point out here, however, that you could literally count on your fingers the number of 19th-century writers who really knew village life from within, that is, who were born and bred in a peasant family. The most famous and talented among them was the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko.

The situation radically changed at the turn of the 20th century when the literary scene was joined by more and more writers who did not have to make any special effort to study the common people because they themselves came from these people and acted as their authorised representatives. The literary works about village life of both main stages in the development of Soviet literature were and still are written by writers of peasant extraction in most cases by far. The first important group of such writers came to the fore after the revolution of 1905 which awakened many millions of peasants. The second wave of writers who were referred to as "peasant" writers, swept into literature after the October Revolution. The third joined it during and directly after collectivisation.

How was rural life depicted in the literature of the 20s and 30s? What proved foremost in its approach to the exceptionally contradictory picture of village life and the socially dual nature of the peasant as both petty proprietor and worker?

In the early 20s critics were primarily concerned with discussing the proletarian literature of the future. However, the journal editorial offices and publishing houses were bursting with manuscripts about fierce peasant rebellions, noisy village meetings, and bearded peasant leaders fervently arguing their case. There was plenty about village life in young Soviet literature and it was all strikingly diverse. One simply cannot find a common creative denominator for the works of, say, Sergei Yesenin, Boris Lavrenev, Ivan Volnov, Lidia Seifullina, Nikolai Ognev, Leonid Leonov, Alexander Neverov, Vsevolod Ivanov, Sergei Podyachev and Vsevolod Shishkov. The books often conflicted with one another in their interpretation of the events which had changed the face of rural Russia.

It is worth noting that in the voices of the first writers of peasant extraction who joined the literary scene at the turn of the century a note of alarm was heard for the fate of the traditional foundations of popular life which were being undermined by the processes of social and economic development. This line was also pursued by literature after the October Revolution. For instance, no matter what evolution Yesenin's poetry underwent in the 20s, the world of the Russian village and Russian nature continued to be presented in his works in a most optimistic and poetic light.

On the whole, however, the literature of the 20s cannot be accused of depicting village life in a glossy, idyllic manner. Elements of what had once been referred to as "the idiocy of village life" (Marx), generously repleted numerous novels and stories. It is another matter that this aspect of the village way of life was re-created by each writer in his own way, and by no means communicated the same ideas or gained a similar emotional pitch in the works of different authors.

The depiction of the backwardness, uncouthness, ignorance and brutality of the old way of life could, and did, in fact, in the works of a number of writers, express alarm at the vast predominance of the peasant population in the country and a high

degree of doubt in the revolution's ability to prevail over the dark instincts and malignant power of the peasants' individualism. This depiction was, however, counterpoised by another, which poeticised the anarchic peasant revolt and enthusiastically portrayed the outburst of unruly spontaneous emotions.

The novellas *Good-for-Nothing Andron* by A. Neverov and *Humus* by Lidia Seifullina, which came out in 1922, charted the most fruitful and long-term trend in the literature about village life by depicting it just as it was in reality but in a way that was not one-sided or static and meant to help the reader understand that the great history being created by the people could actually be glimpsed in the colourful, tangled events and seething, sometimes unbridled passions.

Writers argued among themselves and so did ages, but even more so. So many hitherto unknown phenomena were introduced into rural life, so many new problems arose and prospects were opened up every few years that the literature about village life could not possibly stay the same. Unable to stand the pressure of the class struggles, Yesenin's elegiac pictures of village life receded into the background. As the brief lull in village life came to an end so did the unhurried prosaic portrayal of its morals and manners. And at the same time, the literature of the "great turning-point" in the country's history became more widespread and profound. The theme of country life acquired a deep social and historical meaning and a new epic lease of life: the age-old principles of rural life were presented as they gradually changed, conflicts increased in scale and a new hero, a reformer of life, rose up to fight for the ideals which had been gained through much suffering.

The books published at the end of the 20s and in the early 30s now seem like forts marking the front-lines of the great social battle: Panferov's *Bruski*, Parts I and II, (1928-1930), Kochin's *Lasses* (1928), Zamoisky's *Bast Shoes* (1929), Shukhov's *Hatred* (1931) and the first book of Mikhail Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned* (1932). For all their distinctive individual features, the guiding principle and all-absorbing task of these books is to study, depict and affirm the paths leading the village onto the high road of a new life based on collectivist foundations.

Citing Leonov in his novel *The River*, I repeat that the spirit

of the age was seen in man's decisive break with the heritage of "the decayed world", in his attempt to overcome as quickly as possible the "ancient gloom" shrouding the future, and in the profound social renewal of the vast peasant land. Hence the special attention given to everything standing in the way of this renewal—the land's power to enslave man and the ingrained dangerous instincts of petty ownership. Hence writers' conviction that the peasants had to learn from the working class and follow the example of the greatly advanced socialist towns.

There is a time and place for everything on this earth, remarked Victor Astafiev on the last page of his book *Queen Fish.* There is a time to destroy and a time to build, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to seek and a time to lose...

So, the time has now come to assemble, build and carefully look at the old Russian village which we once so hurried to destroy in our great and noble surge towards the future.

" 'Parm-en? Where's my Parmen? There he is, old chap. Cold, are you? You're cold, laddie. Well, you're a twit, you are, Parmen. Not saying a word, are you? Well, come on, let's get going. You do want to go home, don't you? Parmen, why, Parmen...'

"Ivan had great difficulty untying the frozen reins.

" 'Well, you've been standing here, haven't you? Yes, you have. Waiting for Ivan, right? Right. And Ivan, what was Ivan doing? Well, I was having a bit of a tipple, Parmen, yes, that's what I was doing, but you mustn't be angry with me...' "

Thus begins the novella *That's Life* (1966) by Russian writer Vasili Belov.

It is not easy to retell the story because it is mostly made up of details of the daily round, describing a leisurely-flowing life conditioned by numerous circumstances of varying significance. A collective farmer by the name of Ivan Drynov lives in the northern Russian village of Sosnovka in the hard post-war years. He has hardly any time to think of lofty philosophical matters because he has to rack his brains day and night to find ways of making ends meet, of getting by to the following spring and feeding his large family. Whenever he sees fit, he is in a habit of saying, "That's life!" He loves his wife, Katerina, in his own

way, and year in year out rocks to sleep, in turn, his nine offspring in the cradle hanging from a pole in the middle of the room. He rejoices at the simple things of life such as the meagre northern sun and water, and loves animals. He drinks and makes merry with other menfolk on festive occasions and simply whenever he feels like it. He does all kinds of odd jobs, including some on the collective farm, for which he earns a mere pittance. He is kept busy by all the never-ending household chores, and manages to get by somehow, thanks to his vegetable plot and his cow, Rogulya.

Rogulya is in fact the cause of all the troubles which befell Ivan Afrikanovich who was used to all sorts of misfortunes. Some "illegal" hay, which has been cut from hedgerows and forest clearings, is discovered in the Drynovs' yard, and taken away with threats and menacing remarks. To make things worse, his cow dies. At his wits' end, Ivan sets off to the town in search of work. But when he gets back he finds his wife has died. After mourning and fretting for a while, he finds homes for his children and starts living alone, visiting his wife's grave every now and then to console his broken heart.

How many books since then have been read and then instantly forgotten without leaving the slightest impression! But everything that happened years ago in a remote northern village to Ivan Afrikanovich, to his family and the cow Rogulya is really touching and leaves an indelible imprint in one's memory which cannot be eradicated by time or other, sometimes just as well-written books.

However, if *That's Life* were to appear today, the writer's talent would be praised by critics and his book ranked among the most successful works and that would be that. In the mid-sixties, though, Belov's story, which, incidentally, was published in a provincial journal, attracted much attention and gave rise to a lively debate and, most important, became a definite landmark in the literary process. And it was all due to the fact that literature and all Soviet society had entered a new phase of its development and was called to answer pressing social and cultural demands which had changed in many ways.

"Steam-engine, speed ahead..." goes a song encouraging the country's rapid transformation in the 20s. It was a matter of spe-

cial pride that yesterday's shepherds and ploughmen were leaving their villages to become concrete-workers, plasterers, machine-operators and metal-workers at major construction sites. It was thought that there would always be millions of peasants to look after the land and that no storms would ever get at the rural population's roots which stretched right across the country. However, the pace of the social changes has surpassed all expectations. The names of thousands of villages are disappearing from maps and the way of life of the millions of rural workers who have to do a bigger share of the work in modern agricultural production, is changing. And again, just as in the 20s, almost every other manuscript sent to publishing houses and literary journals, comes under the general heading of "literature about village life".

"Evidently, our generation is the last to have seen with its own eyes, the thousand-year-old tenor of life which engendered almost each and every one of us," wrote Sergei Zalygin in "An Interview with Myself". "If we don't speak about it, and the drastic change which occurred in villages in a short space of time, who will?"[6] The same idea was graphically expressed by Fyodor Abramov at the Fourth All-Union Writers' Congress: "...Now that the old village is nearing the end of its days, we are examining with particular care the type of man who was created by it, and looking closely at our mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers. Alas, few kind words have been said about them! But be that as it may, the weight of all our present-day life rests on the shoulders of these unknown, hard-working forebears of ours. So why should it be surprising that the old peasant woman in our literature has for a while pushed aside and sometimes overshadowed other characters?.. The fact that literature has focused on people of the old and older generation shows an attempt to understand and retain their spiritual experience, and the inner potential and moral power which did not let Russia perish at a time of most terrible ordeals."[7]

The literature about village life was extensive and profound during the period when socialist society was formed and its role has become no less significant at this stage of developed socialism. However, what they really have in common are their scale and their readiness to affirm socialist ideals. As far as *the ways* in

which literature carries out its social mission, they are strikingly variegated even at a superficial level.

In the 20s and 30s nothing could mar the prevailing enthusiasm for *overcoming* all that was backward, dark and stagnant in the old village, all the individualistic and possessive instincts conflicting with the tasks of constructing a new life. In the 60s to the 80s there has been an enthusiastic campaign to *preserve* as a precious requisite of socialist society everything of value in the traditions of village life, such as its unique national character, closeness to nature, work habits and popular ethics.

This change of stress came about in literature over the 50s and has made itself fully felt in the following decade. It was the result of such works as Ovechkin's "Everyday Life in the District", which introduced the idea of "personal responsibility", and showed the need for each agricultural worker to have proper incentives in carrying out all his work. This change of emphasis was expressed and stipulated by Yefim Dorosh's *A Village Diary,* Vladimir Soloukhin's *A Drop of Dew,* Elizar Maltsev's *Enter Every House* and Vladimir Fomenko's *Memory of the Land.* The publication in 1960 of the second book of Mikhail Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned* also gave a mighty impact to literature's movement in this direction.

Starting a new phase of development, the prose about village life inwardly changed in quite a noticeable manner. As soon as it appeared that the real way in which characters and circumstances interacted in village life had been discovered, all the agricultural problems of a technical nature were "weeded out" of fiction and left to sociological and other scientific publications. However, purely social and objectively epic fiction did not entirely vanish from the scene but was merely reduced in scale, acquired new features and began to be used, first and foremost, to study the history of the collective-farm community. And the lyrical theme represented by the works of Vasili Belov, Yevgeni Nosov, Valentin Rasputin and Grant Matevosyan was now in the limelight of the literary process.

The books which appeared during the socialist transformation of the countryside were mostly written, as I have already said, by writers of peasant origin. However, in many ways village life here was depicted from the outside, so to speak, from the point

of view of the socialist town which had been renewed by the revolution and was making great advances. Contemporary lyrical prose, on the contrary, is amazingly adept at re-creating "from within" the agricultural worker's attitudes and views on life and everything happening in the world round him. In this sense recent lyrical prose has essentially far more right to be called "peasant" literature than its predecessor in the 20s.

In lyrical novellas and stories of this type we are primarily shown the peasant's *private life* inside the four walls of his house. However, when reading such works, we never or, to be more exact, rarely feel that their heroes have been deliberately cut off from their surroundings. It simply appears that they have no particular need to look in at the collective farm's or district administrative offices or appear in their professional functions. Such is the case in Vasili Belov's *That's Life*, Valentin Rasputin's *The Last Deadline,* and most of Yevgeni Nosov's stories.

And as is often the case, when one gains in some ways, one is apt to lose out in others. By focussing its attention on a small area, lyrical prose has succeeded in graphically conveying the positive sides of the village way of life, in moulding vivid characters of collective-farm workers, people of high moral principles who have been through countless ordeals. However, in a number of instances such a view of life, unless complemented or put in perspective by broader views, is bound to seem limited.

I am now going to examine two works which are poles apart in genre, size and style. The first is a story titled *The Business Trip* by Azerbaijanian writer Rustam Ibragimbekov.

"In a small village . . . the family of a local teacher who had passed away the year before, was sending the teacher's son off to Baku. He was a tall strapping lad with a determined look and a confident air so typical of young people today."

Why is tall, young and handsome Enver getting ready to leave for Baku, the republic's capital? Why are his mother, grandfather and sisters bustling around him? Well, this is a long story which you will shortly learn. Ten or so years ago Enver's father had gone to Baku to attend some advanced training courses for teachers. He had taken all his savings with him, eight hundred roubles in all, hoping in due time to find lodgings and work in

the city. A certain Bairamov had asked to borrow this money and then never returned it. And now Enver has decided to get the money back, carrying out his deceased father's behest, come what may.

" 'Even if I have to knock his brains out, I'll be back with the money in three or four days' time...'

" 'It's not all that easy in the city, sonny,' warned his grandfather. 'You can't be so pushy there... Your dad took him at his word. But that means nothing as far as the law's concerned.' "

After a bumpy bus ride of several hours Enver arrived in the city. The first thing he did was find Gamid who had once lived in their village but then decided to go to Baku "for a while" and had worked there ever since as a militiaman.

" 'It's hopeless,' he said, continuing to twirl his truncheon, 'we've nothing to go by... And it happened so long ago.' "

" 'Evidence, laws, time,' said Enver, smirking, 'but what about honour, conscience and the truth? Don't they concern anyone here? Is it really true then that only ruthless rogues live in towns?' "

Ready to give anyone a piece of his mind, Enver wandered sullenly round the town with his heavy suitcase, hunting for the scoundrel Bairamov. He was rude to everyone he met and for no reason at all shouted at a friendly old man who showed him the way.

You can learn quite a lot about a town in a few hours. Enver met a local girl by the name of Toma, went with her to see a new film being shot and then watched some young people enjoying themselves in a restaurant out of town. He had too much to drink and began to feel possessive of Toma and jealous of her friends. He picked a fight and woke up the next morning with a headache and purple bruises all over his face. This made him even more convinced that "everyone should live where he's born". "You can live in a town all your life, get fixed up in a job and make friends, but they'll never really be your friends, your work and your town..."

He eventually finds Bairamov, now a pathetic old man who, of course, does not have the money to pay back his old debt. Enver strikes him in a fit of temper but at once comes to his senses. "Enver wiped the blood off the old man's face and as

he did so, he felt tears trickling down his cheeks, and he suddenly flung himself on Bairamov and burst into tears. . ."

Half an hour later Enver is in the square where the streams of traffic are being skilfully directed by his old acquaintance who, incidentally, has been trying to persuade him to get a job at a bakery.

" 'Take me to the bakery,' said Enver. 'I'm going to stay in town for a while. . .' "

Now let's look at *The Flowering of Unsown Rye,* a novel by the Lithuanian writer Vytautas Bubnys, the last part of a trilogy, which included the novels *The Thirsting Land* and *Three Days in August.*

The novel's main hero, Antanas Petrušonis, fought in the war and then returned to his native village where life "was like an ant-hill after a thunderstorm." "The village finally woke up after its long winter's sleep, and shook itself, all agog. The grown-up children began to feel cramped in their parents' huts."

On the crest of this wave of migration Antanas Petrušonis left home for a nearby town where he lived in a hostel and worked as a fitter at a factory. He married a pert young girl called Kaziunia who also came from a village. The years raced by and it was soon time to celebrate their silver wedding. But there was little to celebrate for while his son Viktoras has been away doing his military service, his wife had gone and left him.

The rare occasions on which Antanas now feels happy are when he gets to see his granddaughter Renata.

He has spent twenty-five years in the town but is constantly plagued by the thought of the village he once left and which no longer even exists. He found it impossible working at the factory and so he became a builder instead because it at least meant he could spend the whole day in the open air. "And what mattered most here was that in the same day you might have to work as a concrete-worker and a carpenter and make roofs as well. . . Just like in the old days when you used to plough, sow and mend your simple implements all by yourself. . ." One morning Antanas woke up and felt he must be leaving his senses because he could hear a cockerel crowing nearby. It turned out that the yard-keeper who lived next door had brought it from his village. And it crowed on his balcony for a long time until his daughter

went and poisoned it. Every morning Antanas would look up at the sky and wonder about things in the countryside and whether they were ploughing or sowing at present. Every time he opened the local newspaper he would automatically search through the reports until he found something about his old district.

He bought himself a country cottage and tinkered about there on Sundays. It was easy to get out there, thanks to his car. " 'Still, it's not often that you can get away from your sombre thoughts and enjoy the plasures of the earth. But didn't you hope this vegetable plot would be a substitute for your old village which you left so eagerly. It was only later, much later that you realised there was something missing in your heart and you had nothing to fill in the gap with and so it just got bigger and bigger.' " " 'You will die as you lived.' Antanas Petrušonis shook his head. 'You'll have to drag this burden about with you as long as you live and you'll never get rid of it, even if you wanted to. . .' "

Thousands of kilometres separate Vilnius and Baku, and the hallmark of national identity is indelibly imprinted on the works of the Lithuanian and Azerbaijanian writers. Both are, however, concerned with what may be treated as different ends of the same socio-psychological Gordian knot tied by history in our century. As poet Vladimir Firsov writes:

The North Star is shining
Over our ancient world.
The countryside dreams of towns
And towns of the countryside.

The village population is steadily getting smaller... 70 per cent, 60 per cent, 50 per cent, 40 per cent... The figures flashing on the computer screen indicate the irrepressible process of the country's urbanisation. And they also stand for tens of millions of townspeople who between them have a complete list of village names written in the birth-place section of their passports. Of course, this list is no longer up-to-date and many names of former villages will only live as long as the bearers of these passports.

In the 20s and 30s literature described people's mass migration from villages to building sites and large towns in the most general terms, without examining the psychological details of the changes which these people underwent. This migration was envisaged and depicted as man's emergence from the darkness of the old village way of life, as his liberation from the land's painful shackles, which opened up before him the boundless new vistas of free labour, creativity and struggle.

The problem of the town and village is viewed differently in contemporary literature. Emotional attitudes towards the village have undergone a drastic change; the town has ceased to be regarded as a purely positive social phenomenon. And the fact that "All of Russia was on the move" (A. Malyshkin) has turned into a much more complex and contradictory process, bringing advantages and disadvantages, gains and irreparable losses. The drama of this situation was finely expressed in a few verses by the late Nikolai Rubtsov who wrote of how he was torn between the village and town and longed to live in both at the same time.

What is it that torments him? And how does it affect him? How does a villager picture a town? How does he feel when he starts living there? All these issues were widely and diversely discussed in Soviet literature of the 60s and 70s.

"The villager in the town," said sociologist V. Perevedentsev at a public discussion, "is a highly important and pressing issue for our country. After all, about *four million* people move from villages to towns every year. And almost every one of them must go through the painful process of *readaptation*, that is, destroying the old rural personality and re-creating a new, urban one on its ruins. In scientific terms, this is the problem of marginal (intermediate) man and the marginal personality. Man has broken away from one social environment and not yet managed to enter another. This difficult period in man's life usually entails a certain degree of demoralisation."[8]

The problems of man's readaptation are examined by the abovementioned works of Rustam Ibragimbekov and Vytautas Bubnys. Ibragimbekov's Enver is only just about to go through this process and already shows the usual symptoms of the marginal personality such as excessive scepticism, awkwardness and aggression. And Antanas Petrušonis, who is unable to overcome his

yearning for the land and feeling of guilt towards his old village, reacts to his "intermediate state" as if it were a festering wound and a major disaster.

Any genuine work of art gives us an idea of various social developments and is thus in some way or other social in its content. However, the emphasis here is on "in some way or other" since the social content may be direct and perfectly obvious or indirect and muted.

The 60s were most productive in direct social prose about village life. It was namely at this time that the following works appeared: Maltsev's *Enter Every House*, Fomenko's *Memory of the Land,* Krutilin's *Lipyagi*, Shundik's *In the Blue-Eyed Land,* Jonas Avyžius' *The Village at the Crossroads,* Akhtanov's novella *The Snowstorm,* Antonov's *A Rouble Torn into Two,* Chinghiz Aitmatov's *Farewell, Gulsary.* In the 70s there were considerably less notable works of this type. All the more important is each attempt to catch the pulse of the modern village and progress further along the lines of the social analysis traditional to our literature.

About thirty million people are directly involved in the country's agriculture. Among them approximately five million, that is, one in every six, are tractor and combine drivers. They are totally in control of the country's wheat-belts, which are of vital importance to the economy, and also play a major role in all other branches of agriculture. Yuri Goncharov's novella *The Last Harvest* (1978) is about the life, work and attitudes of one of them.

"He was a taciturn man who was no good at putting into words his kind feelings towards people." This is how a turner in the collective farm's repairs shop is described. And the book's author finds such "taciturn" but hard-working, conscientious, kind and generous people especially attractive. And another such person is the novel's main hero, combine driver Pyotr Makhotkin, a peasant of the new type who embodies the best traditions of old village life with all the diverse qualities of the new, socialist environment.

After being wounded at the front, he returned home to Bobylevka, which had been devastated by the war. For thirty years

he has worked on and with machinery under the scorching sun, in knee-deep mud and in bitter frosts. He buried his wife with whom he had lived during all these years, which were at first unbearably hard and then happier and easier. He now lives with his divorced daughter, Lyuba, and his two grandchildren who delight him with their babbling and insatiable childish curiosity for everything around.

Pyotr cannot imagine working on the land without machines. He is as good with machine parts as his forefathers were with simple leather harnesses. And he truly rejoices at the sight of the collective farm's new combine which has arrived at the station. "He gazed at it and glowed with pleasure... The combine really was marvellous, especially as it was not just any combine but the one he would be working on, and this made him feel something special for it. Without even touching it, Pyotr had already taken it to his heart and loved it as something which belonged to him."

But don't these noisy machines, reeking of diesel fumes, stand between man and nature? Aren't they destroying the poetry of work on the land which has existed since time immemorial? No, the machines themselves are not to blame. It is the attitude to these machines and this work that counts. Lying at night by the warm combine, which has done a hard day's work, Pyotr Makhotkin feels totally at one with all the vast moonlit world around him. He listens to the ripe open ears of barley rustling gently in the perfect stillness. "Pyotr never felt bored alone in the fields. And he never felt lonely either. The combine seemed just as alive to him as he himself."

Sitting by a bonfire on a silent night, he recalls with particular emotion what life was like just after the war and how much they had to put up with at first. "Like the days and nights spent at the front, this could not possibly be conveyed in words: you simply had to summon all the spiritual strength so as to bear it all..." He recalls meeting on one of the front-line roads a ragged old woman who had been keeping a fire going day and night, much needed by people. He starts thinking: "Each man was like a fire at that time, and each man of those days and years gives light and warmth to the living." "Pyotr's heart started pounding with excitement. This thought cast a completely new

light on things, on himself and all his thirty years of labour and also on his whole life which he had hitherto considered perfectly straightforward and simple and in no way out of the ordinary. . ."

You can totally rely on Pyotr Makhotkin, Yegor Dymshakov from Yevgeni Maltsev's novel *Enter Every House*, and Tanabai Bakasov from Chinghiz Aitmatov's novella *Farewell, Gulsary*. Whenever necessary, they will tackle the hardest job, do it as well as they can and never let anyone down because each of them was once like a "fire" for people and as "each man of those days and years gives light and warmth to the living". But how can their earnest devotion to their work be conveyed to people who have never experienced such terrible ordeals themselves? How can one make sure that others recognise the great social significance of their ordinary and seemingly insignificant work? These questions are posed by writers because they are concerned by what they sometimes see, and are convinced that what we have here is a very complex social problem, which is in the process of being solved by society but, unfortunately, has yet to be fully sorted out.

There are no simple answers to the questions which life, constantly in motion and fraught with contradictions, poses society. And there is no end to Soviet literature's quest as it reflects these contradictions and sensitively catches the human, moral and psychological effects of various social conflicts.

The approach to the world of nature in the works of the 20s-40s and 60s-80s (if we mean, of course, their major tendencies) is so diverse that it is as if we were dealing with two entirely different literatures. However, both approaches can be fully explained by the processes pertaining to the development of the country and formation of social consciousness.

I have already spoken of the role played by nature in the epic of the revolution and that of the country's socialist transformation. Nature, as a rule, took the form of terrible calamities which added to the turmoil created by the social storm. And this was determined, of course, not only by the laws of aesthetics. Literature reflected the specific features of social consciousness at a time when the most important social tasks were seen in *over-*

coming all the various obstacles in the way of the new, socialist system and in *changing* and *transforming* everything in the world of nature and of man. As we read in Leonov's *The River*, "This is all timber, scads of timber . . . standing, rotting, withering. It's a breeding ground for mushrooms, bears, hermits, goblins, what you will . . . except good sense and firm direction." And then something else highly characteristic: "Enough timber to last us a thousand years. . ."

The sharp change in man's perception of his relations with nature was marked by Leonid Leonov's novel *The Russian Forest* (1953). The novel not only reflected the changes which were coming about in social consciousness but greatly facilitated them and considerably helped society to realise the pressing need for a new, rational and truly humane attitude to the world of nature.

A few years later the problems brilliantly put across by the central character of Leonov's novel, were being debated as priority issues all over the world. Ecology, examining man's life in close relationship with his immediate environment, became a major science. The reading public was bombarded with books which forecasted the future exhaustion of the earth's resources and warned of the extreme dangers threatening man who was himself causing great damage to the land, water, atmosphere, climate, and the flora and fauna.

Extensive international cooperation was needed to solve these world-wide ecological problems and great significance was attached to the question of which of the existing social systems was capable to better cope with the contradictions which accelerating scientific and technological progress entailed. We are convinced that only socialism can guarantee a truly harmonious relationship between man and nature. However, it is clear that this harmony does not come of its own accord. It is achieved by struggling against antiquated ideas and habits, by overcoming many obstacles and difficulties and searching for the best ways in which man can influence complex natural processes.

One could write a book about the practical efforts of Soviet writers looking for ways of rationally managing the land and effectively using the country's natural riches. Separate chapters

would deal with the solution of problems connected with Lake Baikal, the pros and cons of the project for the Nizhneobskaya Hydro-Electric Power Station, the efforts of many years to preserve the Siberian cedar, and the campaign to protect the Volga and Dnieper rivers, and Azov and Aral seas.

Soviet writers' active work in this field is important but, naturally, they mainly contribute by raising this problem in their writing. And, indeed, the books which deal in some way or other with man's relations with nature, have become part and parcel of contemporary literature.

The primary, elemental type of relations between man and nature which formed and developed over thousands of years can be explained by certain economic and ethical reasons. Man had not yet detached himself from nature and in all his vital activity was an integral part of it. Traces of man's simple and natural existence, which was destroyed by the inexorable course of history can, nevertheless, still be found today. And one of contemporary literature's characteristic traits is the great attention it devotes to these signs of the past which might hold something very important for our future.

"His legs carried him along and he ceased to the aware of himself as something separate, and fused with the sun and the snow and the terribly far-off blue sky and with all the odours and sounds of the coming spring." This is an excerpt from Vasili Belov's *That's Life* in which Ivan is just such a "natural" man. "Like any earth-bound creature, he never thought of his own life as being different from that of the land and water, rains and forests, mists and sun, and without comparing himself or condescending to this world, he lived in simple and complete harmony with it." This is about the tramp Savonya in Yevgeni Nosov's story *Ships Depart But the Shores Stay On*. Akim in Victor Astafiev's *Queen Fish,* and old Momun and the Nivkh fishermen in Chinghiz Aitmatov's novels *The White Steamship* and *The Black-and-White Dog that Runs by the Sea's Edge* have similar relations with nature.

Writers are by no means happy about all the attributes of such personages who sometimes prove amazingly passive and helpless in the social sphere. Ivan, Momun, Savonya and Akim are certainly no paragons, but one definitely sees a reflection of

the aesthetic ideal in their simple and complete harmony with the world of nature.

For all the attractiveness of this primitive fusion, it is undoubtedly a thing of the past. A new organic bond between these two divided parts of a once integral whole will be established one day but meanwhile we are living in an age of sharp discords between man and nature, of a glaring disruption of processes which took the earth hundreds of thousands, if not millions of years, to put right. And literature is studying these discords and reflecting the contradictory essence of economic and scientific progress in which every step forward is both positive and negative, beneficial and detrimental to man.

We have newspapers to launch criticism at people abusing nature and law courts to convict them. Writers, of course, set themselves and their readers other problems that are more complex and diverse, problems of a social, psychological and moral nature. What does a selfish attitude to nature really mean? How can its deep-rooted character and its presence in our new social system be explained? What moral defects is it linked to? What are the causes of man's disastrous intrusions into the world of nature? What ethical and cultural standards does man require to recognise his responsibility to everything in the world? What gives people the courage to fight for public property, even if it costs them their lives?..

The most important of all these questions have to do not so much with the environment as the conscience, dignity, honour, morality and humaneness of man himself. "It seems to me," said Chinghiz Aitmatov, "that literature must not only speak out in the defence of nature as such but also show special concern for the moral and psychological make-up of the human soul, which affects his perception of nature. Literature must concern itself with this, it is its duty and mission to do so."[9]

3. THE TRUTH OF TEAM-LEADER POTAPOV

The prose about village life has won wide acclaim not only because it is written with talent but also because it reflects the predicament and emotional attitudes of Soviet people caught half-

way between the town and the village, as a unique display of a dramatic world-wide process. Prose about industry, as a rule, loses out badly in this respect because of its narrow scope and at times superficial treatment of the social processes at work.

Past experience has taught writers that industrial problems by themselves, without their moral aspect or the human emotions involved in them, cannot acquire an aesthetic quality and be turned into the subject-matter of fiction. It also appeared, however, that the moral aspect of industrial disputes was not enough by itself either. Plays and novels about industrial issues become noteworthy and stand the test of time only when their authors get at the deep social roots of conflicts and characters and when the literary analysis of all the events which come to pass, acquires a socio-psychological and moral nature.

There have been three types of works about industrial life in the history of Soviet literature.

Why are industrial novels of the 20s and 30s, such as Fedor Gladkov's *Cement* and other books about the construction projects of the first five-year plans, still of value today? Because they reflected the change in the world and in man at a sharp turning-point of history. Here we do not find descriptions of production as such, in the purely technical sense of the word: it is permeated through and through with social and class emotions. Labour is not graded according to its significance or content as every swing of the spade, and every barrowful of earth and load of concrete represents one more triumph for the new system and one more leap towards the future. Every such effort testifies to man's participation in social and history-making activity.

The second type of industrial novel appeared in the late 40s and early 50s. Why were they so short-lived? As we have already indicated, mainly because they ignored the principles of realism and their social content had become greatly impoverished. Such works concentrated on the struggle between the old and the new in production but this struggle was determined by the different characters of the conservatives and innovators and not by the real processes and contradictions of social development.

During the 60s and 70s literature overcame this "phobia" of production which was caused by post-war literature's unsuccess-

ful attempts to depict it, and gave this theme back its idea content and aesthetic merits. The industrial theme was re-established in the literary process. However, as we have already said, this was not simply a return to the past, to the epic of the social transformation. Purposeful social and psychological analysis has given the industrial theme a new lease of life and made it topical, artistically novel and profoundly realistic.

In the 50s literature gradually discovered the new specifics of industrial life, which were much more complex and far more ungovernable. We saw how hard it was for writers to give up their former ideas as to their heroes' potentialities and how often they fell into the trap of showing in a purely speculative manner the transformation of laboratories, factories and sometimes even of whole branches of the national economy. However, the new reality was eventually discovered and the literature of the 60s-80s has begun to make a careful and thorough study of the true correlation of characters and circumstances and the real working conditions of large and small collectives.

Boris Yekimov's story *Don't Give Up* is characteristic of this contemporary literature.

The story's main hero, Dmitri Trubin, is an assistant shop manager at a machine-building plant where he has worked for seventeen years, and may therefore be called a veteran. And he has really had to slog hard at this unrewarding work all these years. "No, Trubin did not like his work. Far too rarely did he gain the pleasure and satisfaction which are sometimes the rewards of back-breaking labour. When could he feel satisfied? On the last day of every month when yet again the shop somehow managed to fulfil the plan? No, Trubin knew only too well that this was done by shouting and urging the workers on all the time, and by twisting all the basic engineering and simple human truths. He hated the way things were but he could not deny their practical necessity as he was not in a position to change them. . ." It is hard to find a more accurate description of the knot of contradictions influencing all Dmitri Trubin's life: he hurries to work every morning "to be rushed off his feet like a squirrel in a cage". At the end of each quarter when the work is most hectic he promises himself and his wife, and threatens the management that he will leave this dreadful madhouse and

get a job in a quiet scientific institute but he is also aware of the fact that he is no longer fit for scientific work. He knows in his heart of hearts that he will never leave this factory and that for the rest of his life he will have to run around the different sectors, shouting over the din of the machines, pleading with the suppliers to hurry up, putting slackers to shame and patching up one hole in production after another.

What are these obstacles in their work which Dmitri Trubin and the heroes of Shtemler's novel *An Ordinary Month*, and the novellas *In the Workers' District* by Kashtanov and *The Trainee* by Chernousov, and many other works of contemporary literature, have to deal with?

There need be no doubt that throughout the seventeen years he has worked at the machine-building plant Dmitri Trubin has had to deal with an insatiable beast called "gross output", which is ready to tramp underfoot the products' quality. His mood and frame of mind have naturally been affected by the glaring discrepancies between the contradictory demands made of him: he has to develop new articles, and keep pace with technological progress, on the one hand, and slow down this progress, on the other, by manufacturing the same old goods as long as possible for their production has been mastered well and as far as existing criteria and incentives are concerned, the collective's well-being depends on him doing so. All day long Trubin comes up against the same old defects in the material and technical supplies, against the slackness of hundreds of enterprises which supply his factory with metal, prefabricated articles, instruments and separate parts. He is deeply concerned by the vast problem of labour discipline which has not yet been fully solved by the new system. Under capitalism this problem is alleviated by the fact that each worker is conscious of the competition for his job. But what can Trubin do with a dishonest, unscrupulous slacker if it is virtually impossible to sack him and if his lathe, which is very important to the shop, is going to stand idle without him?

Works of this type touch upon a large and complex social phenomenon: the contradiction between the productive forces and relations of production, which arose during the transitional period before the stage of developed socialism and had yet to be overcome.

In more concrete terms, these are contradictions between the vastly bigger and more complex productive forces of mature socialism and the forms of management, planning and economic stimulation, which in many ways do not conform to these productive forces and slow down their development. It goes without saying that much is being done to overcome these discrepancies. For instance, the system of running the economy is being changed, various types of production complexes formed, and the indices, which are used to evaluate the work of enterprises and construction sites, are being corrected.

This work is complex and nowhere near completion. That is why writers who face up to the realities of life, often make their heroes confront obstacles which they cannot possibly overcome. These personages have dealings with a great many circumstances and conditions forcing them, whether they like it or not, to regard the existing state of things as an indisputable objective reality which cannot be altered for the time being. And these circumstances shape people and make them bend to their will. In its study of these phenomena, literature does not digress from its mission to participate in building a new world. On the contrary, it helps people to see and overcome the contradictions which arise in the course of social development.

What's more, as a whole Soviet literature by no means depicts only "created" man. It looks for and finds possible ways of showing man's active opposition to unfavourable circumstances. This is confirmed by the lively public interest which was aroused at the end of the 60s by Ignati Dvoretsky's play *The Man from Outside.*

One may recall a great many cases when literature used the device of the "man from outside" to review a certain group of people or sphere of reality through the fresh, unbiassed and even naive eyes of a newcomer. Such a figure was Chatsky (Griboyedov's play *Wit Works Woe*), who became immersed in the life of Moscow's salons, and so was Davydov, a Petrograd factory-worker who came to a remote Cossack village (Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Upturned*), and Bakhirev, a tank constructor who went to work at a tractor factory (Galina Nikolayeva's *The Battle Along the Road*). And, finally, so was engineer Alexei Cheshkov, who was invited to a factory to find and eliminate the

causes for hold-ups in a large foundry fitted out with ultra-modern equipment.

During the discussions of this work after its publication, it was decided that Alexei Cheshkov's harsh, highly rational, and strict methods of working with the personnel were unlikely to have produced successful results. At one such discussion the author admitted that in real life Cheshkov's prototype had not survived the dispute with the collective and himself left the factory after a while.

How then can one explain the great impression made by Ignati Dvoretsky's play seeing that it solved the problem in question in such an unsatisfactory manner and, what's more, was far from being perfect as a work of art?

To my mind, the answer to this question is to be sought not only in the dramatic work itself, but also in the time when it appeared and in the way it corresponded with the attitudes prevailing in the social consciousness of the time.

The lack of coordination and discipline in planning, supplies and other aspects of production, which has become common at many enterprises, and incompetent management cannot be tolerated any longer. It is imperative to master the modern science of management because on it depends people's material as well as moral well-being, and also the way in which practice and theory, words and actions are matched in a labour collective. And surely one way of solving this problem is by being firmer and stricter, and by making sure each person carries out his production and social duties.

By responding to these urgent problems and vividly reflecting them, Dvoretsky's play instantly caused a lot of objections, doubts and questions such as how one should deal with people who do not meet the requirements of modern production, who, despite all their services in the past, are no longer capable of accepting its pace and style and even if they did, are unprepared to work in the new conditions. Is a humane attitude to slackers and other people unfit for the work justified if it is to the detriment of everyone else? How can the inexorable demands of a rational and business-like approach be reconciled to a humane one? Is it possible to drastically reorganise work only by applying pressure from above, and without subordinates actively participating? How

about people who not only have a heightened sense of self-esteem but also can easily rid themselves of disagreeable management by moving on to another job? What real chance does a hero have in a conflict with a conservative collective which is used to its old standards? In short, how can production relations be adjusted so that they fully answer the economic and social demands of developed socialism and greatly help to maintain a communist moral code? These questions define the main trends in present-day literature's interpretation of the industrial theme.

There are a great many well-known construction sites in the Soviet Union but the most important for Soviet art has been one which is not marked on any maps, namely, the construction of a certain chemical works supervized by Building Trust Number 101.

Premium, directed by Sergei Mikaelyan (film-script by Alexander Gelman), was one of the best films of the 70s on a contemporary topic. It won wide acclaim among Soviet film-goers and in many countries abroad. The stage version of this work has also been a great success. Alexander Gelman's play *A Session of the Party Committee* has been staged by many theatres, including the Moscow Art Theatre and Leningrad Drama Theatre. There have been quite a few stagings of this play in the socialist countries. In the German Democratic Republic after collectives had seen the play, they sometimes held discussions in which they linked what they had just heard with their own cares and concerns at work. In Poland the workers of one design institute, following the example of Gelman's heroes, refused their premium, declaring that it did not reflect the real results of their work. One has to agree that such an interest could only be aroused by, firstly, an exceptionally talented work and, secondly, by one which answered certain vital social needs.

So what actually happened in this Building Trust Number 101 invented by Gelman?

The first point worth noting is that Gelman is against introducing any secondary family or love dramas, which are often used to add a sentimental touch to the the industrial problems. This was a tradition, which many writers in their time paid tribute to, starting with Galina Nikolayeva (the eternal triangle in *The Battle Along*

the Road) and ending with Ignati Dvoretsky (Cheshkov's personal drama in *The Man from Outside*). There is nothing of the kind in *Premium*. Just like in the industrial novels and plays of the 30s, the play reflects the author's strong conviction that the sphere of production and man's occupation should not be used as a backcloth for human dramas which are as old as the hills. On the contrary, it is the true life of many people united by their team spirit into a single collective. And, what's more, this life is so interesting and so full of cares and worries that there is no need really to artificially dress it up with various love dramas.

So, a meeting is being held in the trust's Party committee, a special, unplanned meeting necessitated by an unexpected happening. On its results of the previous year the trust has come third in the ministry's system, for which it has been awarded a certain sum of money. All its builders have been given a premium and only Potapov's team, which builds filter installations, has for some unaccountable reason gone and turned the premium down.

"Because, you see, Lev Alexeyevich," Potapov announces to Solomakhin, the Party committee secretary, "we workers can't afford this marvellous premium! It doesn't pay us to take it!"

The sums Potapov does aloud are simple. For instance, a worker by the name of Zharikov, who is there with him, lost no less than four hundred roubles during the year because of the time he wasted through constant delays in supplies. And as a piece-worker this is a telling blow to his earnings. And the premium of fifty roubles given to him now is not really a premium at all. "It's just a tip and an insult, if you really want to know!"

The premium plays an important part in industrial life as a means of giving both material and moral incentive to workers, and of realising the basic principle of socialism: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his work." This is the ideal case when the mechanism of material incentive is used rationally and purposefully. But how often things turn out differently in reality! A premium given to everyone regardless, simply becomes a bonus to people's basic pay to which they soon get accustomed. A premium is given for the good results of a *quantitative* showing while obvious flaws are being ignored in the

quality of the production. Premiums are being distributed and presented in camera without the participation of public organisations... Thus, as a result, we have in many cases pseudo-premiums, which leave their mark on the life of industrial collectives and on people's attitudes and moral make-up.

And it is such a case that is first on the agenda of the building trust's Party committee meeting. Obviously, the moral side of the issue is what matters most. What could be simpler than signing your name in a register and slipping a wad of notes into your pocket? However, it also automatically means you agree that the trust deserves rewarding and that you approve the way things are run in it. "But what's he to approve of? What's he to agree with?" asked Potapov, pointing at Tolya Zharikov again. "Time being wasted? Losing four hundred roubles?"

So far the trust's manager, Pavel Yemelyanovich Batartsev does not feel piqued. He listens to Potapov's explanations even with certain satisfaction. He applauds the men for wishing, as they are fully entitled, to work flat-out all day and to be rewarded accordingly. But, alas, the rules and regulations in construction work were introduced long before his time. There are certain obstacles which can be removed only by state measures. "You see, Lev Alexeyevich," Batartsev admits, "it's in my power to organise premiums but seeing that your work isn't interrupted by late supplies is another matter... At present the trust has not been fully supplied with materials needed for eleven different types of work!" However, the team can be issued some of the trust's own materials which are kept in stock.

The dramatist's prowess is seen in the way the play's action abounds in sharp twists and turns, and expands in concentric circles, constantly revealing new aspects of the matter, and forcing all the characters to show their worth and take up a definite position. It may seem at this point that the issue has been fully dealt with: the men have kicked up a fuss to draw the management's attention to scandalous facts explaining why so much time is being wasted. As a result, the trust's manager makes a public statement in which he promises that the team's building-material supplies will be very shortly improved. The men may now go to the accounts department and collect their money, which may not be very much but will still come in handy.

However, Potapov has no intention of letting the matter drop at that stage.

"*Potapov* (slowly). Of course, I never doubted you could give one or two teams special work conditions so that they could earn more. But that's not why we're here. It's not money we're after! We just can't fathom out how it is that with such great hold-ups—and everyone in the trust has to put up with them, you know—we've still managed to do more work than was set by the plan. What kind of plan is it, then? One thing I do know is that at the beginning of the year, we had a different plan and that first plan we never got done. And then it was cut down at the end of the year and then, surprise, surprise, we do wonders with the reversed one and come out third in the ministry's competition!

"*Batartsev*: If you ask me, you're barking up the wrong tree!... Don't you know why the trust's plan was, as you put it, 'cut down'?

"*Potapov*: Yes, I do! A letter was sent off explaining that nothing but objective factors had prevented the trust from fulfilling the plan. That we didn't have enough cement, pipes and timber because our suppliers had let us down.

"*Batartsev*: Now you're talking sense.

"*Potapov:* Well, what I'm going to say now, you, Pavel Yemelyanovich, will call a lot of rubbish! It wasn't because we didn't have enough pipes or cement that we failed to get our initial plan done but because work on the site wasn't organised properly! And we haven't come in third! This premium's a complete sham!..."

So that's how matters stand! An incident that demanded, to Batartsev's mind, a short edifying talk with the team-leader and one or two instructions in passing, suddenly gives rise to a serious discussion in which it is impossible to play at verbal hide-and-seek and in which everyone must show his true worth.

However, such a complete exposure of characters and standpoints is still a long way off. At this stage the question posed by Potapov merely becomes more acute, casting light an problems of vital importance for everyone taking part in the meeting. How much responsibility can, in fact, be laid on the management for what happened during the past year? How are the objective conditions which the trust's builders are put in and

their own efforts connected? How should the trust manager's application for a revision of the plan be assessed in economic and moral terms?

The argument which flares up is between self-confident Batartsev who knows all the finer points in dealing with the higher authorities, and enterprising, acrimonious Shatunov, the head of the planning department, on the one hand, and Potapov, the conscientious leader of one of the dozens of teams building the chemical works, on the other. The latter's great advantage over his tough opponents is that he has a very good idea of what these controversial relations between subjective and objective factors are like in real life, at the work site.

Potapov gives the committee members an idea of the team's work over the past week. The daily interruptions of work are caused by a lack of concrete although the trust cannot complain about not having enough cement. The team-leader wastes a whole day looking for some doors without which the builders cannot proceed. The team has to start from scratch rebuilding the foundation after it has been completed because the trust's design offices forgot to send off the revised draught in time.

Can the facts produced by Potapov be denied? No. But in this matter neither side wants to give in. Shatunov, the head of the planning department, sharply criticises the team-leader, accusing him of slandering the trust's collective by judging how things stand by the situation in his own team and of taking it upon himself to discuss things which he knows nothing about.

The course of events takes another unexpected turn: two notebooks containing a detailed analysis of the trust's state of affairs are produced from Tolya Zharikov's cloth-bag. This episode in the film released in 1975 is reminiscent of the novels *Cement* by Gladkov and *The Blast-Furnace* by Lyashko, which were published exactly fifty years earlier, in 1925.

The workers reconstructing factories and works after the Civil War did not have the faintest idea of things such as economics, finances and planning. Even the papers containing all these strange facts and figures seemed suspicious and disagreeable to them. In *The Blast-Furnace* we read: "We were led into an adjoining room with a partition behind which there were tables, typewriters and piles upon piles of paper, so much so that we

began to feel dizzy!" And in *Cement* Gladkov writes about how his central character, Gleb, made a detailed study of the way things were run and voluntarily undertook ungratifying and hard job of trying to work out rows and rows of figures and sorting through piles and piles of papers. It turned out to be a complete waste of time because he could not make head or tail of the masses of facts and figures.

An entire age has passed since then and now we have a film and a play in which the papers containing the "masses" of facts and figures play a very different role. They now comprise a qualified economic analysis of the building trust's work, which has been elaborated on the initiative of the workers themselves and with their active participation. The value of this analysis is that it clearly differentiates between the objective factors which did, in fact, depend on the trust's collective and those that did not. And its main conclusion is that the trust is suffering not so much from a shortage of building materials as from a lack of proper organisation.

Everything in the film-script casts light on the highly topical questions about the barely perceptible boundary between a man's predicament and his fault in his work. His predicament is caused by unrealistic plan targets, incentives and conditions given to him from outside which he is bound to comply with. And he is at fault when he himself digresses from the truly socialist principles of management. However, a predicament has a cunning knack of getting inextricably bound up with one's fault so that it is difficult to tell which is which. When troubles at work are in many ways determined by something general and vague, which cannot be pinned onto the work of concrete people, it is easy to assume that this general cause is to blame for all the other flaws and setbacks. And then, when everyone is to blame to a certain extent, it seems that nobody is really.

Alexander Gelman penetrates deeply into the problems alarming him and returns in his analysis to a point when the construction of the chemical works had only just begun. It turns out that Batartsev wanted to start work according to all the rules but that he was forced to set to before the construction work's preliminary stage was over and before the necessary documentation had been prepared.

"*Potapov*: And you didn't raise objections?..

"*Batartsev*: Well, what do you think, Comrade Potapov, of course, I did!

"*Potapov*: So what exactly did you do, then?

"*Batartsev*: I had a word with our central board and tried to explain the matter to them. I even lost my temper and swore at them!

"*Potapov*: And how did they react?

"*Batartsev*: They just patted me on the back and tried to pacify me by saying everything would get back to normal in due time...

"*Potapov*: And then what did you do?

"*Batartsev*: What else could I do?

"*Potapov:* Why, you could have put the question point-blank to them or at least written a notice stating that either the work should be delayed until everything was ready or else you'd quit.

"*Kochnov:* It appears, Potapov, that you're a very naive fellow! If Comrade Batartsev here had quit, someone else would simply have taken over and started work straightaway!

"*Potapov*: I'm sure you're wrong here! When questions are put point-blank, people are made to think. Things start dawning on them then..."

There is a lot one can say about this scene. Here is one of those moments when a manager's predicament and his personal fault are interlinked. It is a question of duty and conscience, discipline and responsibility in a matter demanding an unequivocal moral choice. We are given a deep analysis of a characte- formed by definite conditions.

Strictly speaking, this is not a new character, for it was already studied by Soviet literature in the 50s. Take, for instance, Valgan in Galina Nikolayeva's *The Battle Along the Road,* and Drozdov in Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone.* Now they are joined by Batartsev, the trust's fifty-two-year-old manager in charge of the construction of a new chemical works.

Two decades separate Batartsev from his literary predecessors and this has a telling effect on the traits of his character. Valgan and Drozdov worked during the war, when set targets had to be reached, come what may, and their style of managing production by sheer force of will was the only one that worked. Batartsev

is a younger man and when he started working on construction sites and even more so in managerial posts, things were already very different. He is hardly as integrai and confident of his infallibility as Valgan and Drozdov were. He knows perfectly well what the ideal way is to start, carry out and finish construction projects, working systematically and economically but there are objective factors which he considers he can do nothing about. And then there are the ministry's instructions and patronising slaps on the back, urging him to get on with the work and ensuring him that things are bound to sort themselves out in the end.

What is new to this type of character is the impulse that causes Batartsev to swear to himself and his immediate aids that the construction work will be started according to all the rules. And so is his self-critical conversation one night six months later, when things have not gone as planned but can still be put right. And so is the way he acts at the Party committee meeting when he suddenly raises his hand in favour of the motion which puts him in a critical position as a manager. It is impossible to imagine Valgan or Drozdov doing likewise in such a situation.

Basically, however, the character remains the same: he is sensitive and wary of anything coming from "above"; his usual tactics of keeping on good terms with the ministry have developed into a strategy; he is good at getting out of complex financial and economic tight corners, and getting round contradictory demands and showings. Then there are all his compromises, completely ruling out any good intentions and emotions. One intuitively senses his crucial misconception of the boundary between what is permissible and what is not. Then there is his sincere conviction that he is acting not only in the trust's interests but also in those of the job at hand by signing the application for a review of the plan's target and by proposing the works should be put into operation without a central laboratory, a machinery repairs base and filter installations.

In actual fact, Batartsev is not simply formed as a manager by the contradictory circumstances of industrial life, which in many ways do not correspond with the spirit of the age. He also guarantees that these circumstances will remain intact for any length of time. Between character and circumstances in the given

case there is not only a direct link but also an inverse one. And this link, which undoubtedly exists between the actions of individual people and the overall situation in a certain sphere of life, causes the main protagonists of *Premium* to come to definite and uncompromising conclusions.

"*Chernikov*: ...You personally are to blame, Pavel Yemelyanovich, that we started work on the site the way we did. And that we're now finishing it the way we are!

"*Solomakhin*: ...Pavel Yemelyanovich has said here that he was forced to start work in unreasonable circumstances because he didn't have various essential things he needed. But by insisting now the chemical works should be put into operation without a laboratory and other necessary installations, you, Pavel Yemelyanovich, are forcing its director to start work in exactly the same way. He won't have various things he needs either! And so he'll be shrugging his shoulders and claiming he's not to blame, too, it's all because of objective factors! But these factors don't just drop from the sky—they're caused by people's irresponsible actions."

It once seemed that all one had to do was expose and condemn bad management methods and replace all the Borzovs and Valgans by Martynovs and Bakhirevs, and things would at once start getting better. Since then, however, literature (and social consciousness as a whole) has covered a long way in its development. Now we are well aware that everything is not as simple as it seemed at first glance and that characters and circumstances are joined together in the most intricate knots, which have to be untied simultaneously from different ends. The Borzovs disappeared as soon as the collective-farmers were given due material incentives as compensation for their work. The Batartsevs will most likely leave the social scene as soon as capital construction is put on a new economic basis.

Does this mean, though, that Pavel Yemelyanovich should be left in peace until the existing construction methods are replaced by more rational, better ones? No is the answer, judging by the play's content. Nobody will ever change these conditions just by setting hopes on someone else, and endlessly putting up with the things contradicting our ideals. Vicious circles and chains of circumstances of every sort and kind where the real wrong-doer

cannot be found, will be broken only when each collective, regardless of its size, looks at itself with a critical eye, and stops contributing to the undesirable phenomena which it complains of and itself suffers from. In short, (I quote this time from another of Gelman's plays): "Changes will come about as soon as someone starts changing things."

The two-point proposal, which Potapov puts forward at the Party committee meeting on behalf of his team is ridiculous, naive, and just the right thing (depending on how those present look at it!). Firstly, he suggests asking the ministry to reintroduce the initial version of the plan for the previous year, which had been revised on unsubstantial grounds. Secondly, they are to return to the bank the undeserved premium of thirty-seven thousand roubles after getting it back from all the trust's workers. Of course, such a thing was unheard of but, never mind, it would be now. "When each and every one of us has given back the premium and we've been told that we haven't in fact fulfilled the plan and we're ticked off, as we ought to be, instead of being praised, and we've stopped smarting from the disgrace and, believe me, it's going to be a great disgrace, then things will start going differently..."

Batartsev, whom this affects more than anyone else, suddenly starts speaking about his past life and lot as a manager. Instead of being angry, as one might have expected, he is, first of all, jealous. He is terribly jealous of these people who can speak and act, maybe rashly and naively, but nevertheless, as they please and as their conscience tells them to. He looks at Potapov and thinks: "I simply want to feel myself in the shoes of a person who can stand up and speak like this! I've never felt like this."

He then shifts his gaze to the Party committee secretary, who has already expressed his opinion: "Why are you so free while I am in all these chains and fetters!"

The course of events takes a final sharp turn just before the end. It becomes known that part of Potapov's team—seven men, to be precise—have, in fact, accepted the premium. Shocked and shaken by this news, Potapov "turned round and walked blindly towards the door". Shatunov drily suggests that an end be put to this ridiculous story and announces the meeting over. And

then the Party committee secretary, who has said little during the meeting, finally explodes.

"*Solomakhin*: The meeting's going on, Boris Petrovich! (He stands up. Getting angrier): I don't consider anything has changed as far as all of us here are concerned just because some men have accepted the premium! We enjoy taking the floor and praising the working class to the skies! And we're good at it, too! We congratulate our men on being competent, highly-skilled, intelligent and really in charge of the job at hand! But when these same men in charge come and open their hearts to us and explain everything that's wrong, we just give them the cold shoulder!... And do you know, Boris Petrovich, why these seven men accepted the premium? Because they simply don't believe Potapov will get anywhere or that anything can be changed at this site! So are we really going to show them they're right? Why? Why are we going to kill the most important thing people have—their faith that they're not mere pawns in life, that they really can change things and make them better? I now put Party member Potapov's proposal to the vote."

In the Leningrad Drama Theatre the end of the play differed somewhat from the last sequences of the film *Premium*. Kirill Lavrov, who was acting the part of Solomakhin, repeated this question once more, addressing the audience as he stood right at the front of the stage. As producer Georgi Tovstonogov writes, "Lavrov poses this question in such a way that he does not ask the audience to actually cast their vote but rather announces the end of the play and calls on everyone present to ponder over what has happened. However, on some occasions spectators take this question literally and a great many of them raise their hands."[10]

In my view, such a vote always takes place at the end of the play and the film even if it is not actually expressed. While watching the story unfold, people of the most diverse professions, from different countries and even social systems, automatically define their position because everyone at some time or other encounters what seem like insurmountable circumstances and everyone has to decide how to act when dealing with a situation which is wrong. And everyone wonders whether he can change things and make them better.

When you hear the terms "industrial plays", "industrial novels" being used by our literary critics and historians, you can't help wondering what plays or novels they actually have in mind. The fact is that the industrial theme in Soviet fiction, drama and films has not only gone through a long evolution over the last sixty years but has also been expressed in very diverse forms.

Valentin Katayev's *Onwards, Time!,* Leonid Leonov's *The River,* Nikolai Pogodin's *Tempo* and other works of the period of the first five-year plan, are closely connected in their ideas and creative message with the best industrial novels, novellas and plays of today.

This continuity is seen in the author's active attitude to everything he writes about and in the most profound democratism of Soviet literature and foremost positions in it of the working man who fights for the ideals of the new system. Nevertheless, we cannot help but notice differences in the content and form of works written at different stages of Soviet history.

The high artistic quality of the epic of the socialist transformation is in many ways explained by the fact that it was written by the best writers of the time, including ones who had not touched on the industrial theme previously. However, a very important factor here is that they *were capable* of writing these books. The object they had in mind, as a rule, did not require an engineer's qualifications or a profound knowledge of one or another branch of industry. A talented writer, who had been seized by the enthusiastic remaking of the old world and longed to create an epic image of the country which had risen up and was changing its face, striving towards the future, had only to look at these construction projects through the eyes of the thousands of people who had arrived at them for the first time. It was enough for him to feel the unique atmosphere of collective labour, and catch the visible signs of the spiritual transformation of people who had found their place in life, building socialism along with others.

The task of a writer depicting enterprises and construction sites today is more complex in that the connection between "iron and technology" (in the words of the novel *People from the Back of Beyond*) and world processes, between the oil and steel statistics and the ideals of the new system, has become more indirect and

more remote psychologically. It is up to the writer to reveal the social processes taking place in the world of labour and make a subtle psychological analysis of people's mutual relations determined by many interwoven factors, and to frankly describe the conflicts in which the positions and interests of many people are at stake. By no means every writer succeeds in doing all this. And one can hardly consider it fortuitous that the most successful works of late (such as Gelman's *Premium,* Kuvayev's *Territory* and Gerasimov's *A Factory Is Commissioned*) are by writers with not only talent but also a meticulous knowledge of their subject-matter.

The deep universal meaning of contemporary Soviet literature on industrial themes is less obvious and harder to discern but it certainly exists for only by solving vital economic problems can socialist society progress further.

In his speech at the closing of the 10th All-Russia Conference of the RCP (Bolsheviks) on May 28, 1921, V. I. Lenin said something unexpected for many of his audience who had taken part in the Civil War: "We are now exercising our main influence on the international revolution through our economic policy."[11] Since then the country has changed immensely and so has the world, but this idea of Lenin's is just as true and topical as it was sixty years ago. As Leonid Brezhnev noted in one of his speeches, "...The economy, the creation of communism's material and technical foundation, is the main bridgehead of the Soviet people's struggle for the victory of communism. Soviet society's rate of advance, the course of competition between the two world systems and our contribution to the development of the world-revolutionary process will depend to a decisive degree on how we develop the economy."[12]

Such is the class and ideological aspect of the industrial theme. Treated broadly, in all its social, psychological and moral aspects, this theme undoubtedly was, is and always will be one of the main trends of Soviet literature.

4. THE LITERATURE OF EVERYDAY LIFE

One of the main thematic lines in the literature of the 60s to the 80s is of a directly social nature in its treatment of contemporary issues, and has a propensity for depicting man at work,

in a collective, as he solves or comes to terms with the problems of social development. Another thematic line comprises works reflecting man in the private atmosphere of his home.

Criticism, which tends to divide literature into themes, calls this latter thematic line literature of morals and manners. There is certainly good reason for this but one has to bear in mind that the protagonists of books of this kind may be villagers or townspeople, collective farmers or workers, people doing mental or physical work. In all cases, however, the reader is introduced to their everyday life and the writer's attention is focused on the many kinds of situations of a moral and psychological nature, which arise in the course of this life.

Were similar books written in the 20s to the 40s? Yes, they were, but they played a much less significant role in the literary process, especially when epic works reached their peak both in number and quality.

The situation altered noticeably at the turn of the 60s when, with the discovery and artistic assimilation of the new stage in the socialist society's development, the typological classification of literature had to be revised considerably. This was true not only of Soviet literature but also of the literatures in the other socialist countries. In view of these changes, literary theoreticians were set the task of somehow designating this fairly important part of literature which re-created ordinary people's everyday life.

Soviet critics began writing about the intensive development of the lyrical trend and literature's persistent study of problems of a moral nature. Slovak writers suggested the term "literature of everyday life" while Polish critics started using the concept "small realism".

What role is played by the literature of everyday life (if we are to accept this designation) in the current literary process? In terms of quantity, a very large one. In practically every issue of every literary journal we find a novel, novella or at least a story about the daily round of Soviet people today. In the same journal we are almost certain to find a poem about everyday life, which is known in general as "intimate lyrical" poetry. It is another matter that the ease with which introspective emotions are expressed and people's everyday lives depicted is, in fact, highly deceptive. A vast number of such works come and go with-

out leaving any impression at all on literature or the reader's memory, and without penetrating the mundane surface of life and getting to the deep phenomena underlying present-day reality.

For some writers the literature of everyday life is the only or, at any rate, most important means of their artistic self-expression. For instance, the writings of Yuri Kazakov, Irina Grekova and Georgi Semyonov are almost exclusively on this theme. Sometimes we come across highly interesting cases when writers have switched over from one major theme to another. Examples of this are provided by Sergei Zalygin's *Salt Valley* and *The South American Version,* Yuri Trifonov's *The Impatient Ones* and his "Moscow" novellas, Grigori Baklanov's *July 1941* and *Friends,* Vasili Shukshin's *Stepan Razin* and many of his other stories.

There is a vast number of different ways open to a researcher wishing to write about any aspect of contemporary Soviet literature. He may begin in the north, south, east or west of the country and examine the national literatures in the most varied combinations everywhere finding material with which to make theoretical generalisations. And it is purely my personal preferences as a reader rather than considerations based on principle that have led me to choose the following route from the Caucasus to the Baltic Republics and then on to Moscow, which has become somewhat a tradition.

I shall start by looking at three Azerbaijanian novellas: *An Old Baku Street* by Rustam Ibragimbekov, *There Was Never a Better Brother* by Maksud Ibragimbekov and *Magomed, Mamed, Mamish* by Chinghiz Guseinov.

These novellas were published respectively in 1968, 1973 and 1975. They are very diverse in style. Rustam Ibragimbekov's novella is written in the traditional style of a story of morals and manners. By treating the outward details of the plot with a degree of ironic detachment, Maksud Ibragimbekov shows us the inner world of an ideal, just and universally respected hero by the name of Dzhalil-muallim (this affix to a name in the East is a sign of the greatest respect). Chinghiz Guseinov's novel has a rather complex structure with author's commentaries, time shifts, and italicised inner monologues. In point of fact, as the author says

himself, this is "a novella with dreams and their interpretations, with naive symbols, fairy-tale grotesque, sentimental digressions and an epilogue reminiscent of a prologue. . ."

Are there grounds for examining these works together? Yes, and, what's more, quite substantial ones.

I shall start off by noting that all these novellas are set in the present. The events of all three take place in the same large southern city of Baku, and what's more, in the same old part of the city. Their young heroes—Murad, Simurg and Mamish—could quite easily be friends because all three are oil-industry workers on the famous Neftyanie Kamni oil rigs. When Maksud Ibragimbekov's *There Was Never a Better Brother* came out as a book he changed its title to *The Quarrel.* And this title could just as well be used for the other two novellas because Rustam Ibagimbekov's novella begins and ends with a quarrel and the plot of *Magomed, Mamed, Mamish* is based on an argument in a very large family.

To better understand what causes these quarrels and why they gain considerable social interest, let us take a closer look at the setting and milieu chosen by the authors.

The capital of Azerbaijan forms a wide arc in a sea bay, and, rising up into the hills, looks as if it is built in three tiers. The lower one is covered by boulevards, wide avenues and grand municipal buildings. Higher up, the one-storey houses of old Baku with their tiny yards and flat roofs huddle against the slopes. And higher still, running along the hill-tops on a plateau are modern blocks of flats of white stone and concrete.

Of course, old Baku does not live a special life of its own in complete isolation, but the features characteristic of the Azerbaijanian people's way of life are condensed here. And these features writers consider sufficiently complex and contradictory to warrant a literary study.

In the heat of the day all the old streets looking down on the serene or rough Caspian, become deserted but in the cool of the evening the local people "following a custom they had inherited from their forebears, come out into the street, wash the hot pavements down with cold water and, settling themselves comfortably on rugs, low benches and the stone steps, or simply standing at the crossroads, they pass the time of day, play counter games

and drink tea from small bulbous glasses". They have their own clubs, which are usually situated near beer-bars and food stalls. Here, on these tiny islets dotted about the huge town, just like in small villages, everybody knows everybody else and stares curiously at any newcomer. You cannot live as you please here without thinking about your neighbours and how they will react to everything you do.

After entering an old oriental bathhouse with fiercely sizzling boilers, we discover behind its back wall a well-kept little garden and the stone house of the post-master Dzhalil-muallim. You will not find a single person in the district who will speak disrespectfully of him. Everyone knows that Dzhalil-muallim started from scratch here as a postman and that after his father's death at the war, he has piously carried out his duties as successor and head of the family, a respectful son of Mariam-khanum, and considerate husband, father and brother. What's more, "even Prosecutor Gasanov who lived nearby had to concede the position of the most honoured citizen to Dzhalil-muallim in the unofficial opinion poll that was regularly held in the district".

No gains without pains and Dzhalil-muallim certainly has his fair share as he strictly and consistently adheres to the customs and traditions, which have been passed down by his forebears and run through man's life from the cradle to the grave, and as he tirelessly protects his family's honour and reputation in the eyes of their neighbours and relatives.

Why then, as the plot unfolds, does Dzhalil-muallim's cool garden seem more and more stifling and why does his house's flat roof press down harder and harder on us? Because the rational and irrational are very closely interwoven in all the old national customs. Because any customs are liable to lose their rational content and become mere rituals binding man hand and foot. Because, no matter how much we would like to, we cannot really share Dzhalil-muallim's ideal, which is that everything in life should remain the same from one generation to the next. Because you can at times see signs of strain and pretence in Dzhalil-muallim's daily concerns about his reputation as a successful and dignified man. Because an attentive eye cannot help noticing the profound lack of spirituality in his life behind the transparent screen of his pious rites.

Then something irreparable happened. A local newspaper published a satirical article mentioning, among others, the name of his young brother Simurg, and thus his name, too, which had never been smeared before. In a trance, Dzhalil-muallim infringed his official duties for the first and last time in his life: he bought up five thousand copies of the newspaper in the surrounding district. But then things went from bad to worse. Simurg suddenly announced he was marrying Dilber, the daughter of their neighbour who came from heaven knows where.

" 'You're my brother,' said Dzhalil-muallim. 'How can you dream of marrying someone like Dilber? What sort of blood do you want to mix with ours?.. If you're a real man, you'll forget her. Think of your honour!'

" 'I love her,' said Simurg...

" 'Then you can forget you've got a brother,' said Dzhalil-muallim. 'I've forgiven you everything before now but this is the absolute limit!' "

When we first meet Dzhalil-muallim at the very beginning of the story, he is already profoundly shaken by these happenings, which have caused his life to lose its habitual rhythm. And although he outwardly appears unchanged, one now catches glimpses of something which was hard to detect before: his coldness towards others, even his closest ones, and his irritation, which at times turns into suffocating outbursts of temper. And the narrative about the most respected man in the district ends with him having a fatal fit of this kind. After being bitten by his bees, which are very sensitive to irritated people, he starts screaming at the top of his voice and hurling abuse at his brother and the latter's family and then dies with a feeling that he has somehow made an irreparable mistake.

Let us leave inconsolable Simurg and hurry over to a nearby old Baku street which has frozen in anticipation of a dramatic event. Unexpectedly Agabala, a driver, has been let out of prison early and everybody knows that today he is going to get even with Safarali, a bar-tender, who has been living with his wife in his absence. Safarali resignedly awaits his fate. A group of young men has frozen stock-still at a crossroads. The local militiaman, Mustafa, is pretending to be deeply engrossed in a newspaper. On his way home with two attractive companions, Dzhangir, the

prosecutor's son, is given all sorts of quizzical, rapturous and censorious stares. He has promised his companions a very exotic show which they will be able to see well from his apartment windows.

A few minutes later Agabala shows up in the street, carrying something heavy in a newspaper. Safarali starts shouting for help and tries to hide but it's too late: he is struck on the head. People start crowding round the man lying on the ground and the militiaman unhurriedly makes his way through them...

After reading about the life of respected Dzhalil-muallim, we might think that the people preserving the traditions are mostly old. Here, however, in this old Baku street, we realise that things are much more complicated. The swarthy-skinned lads who have crowded together at their favourite crossroads are not at all indifferent to these traditions either. The young oil-worker Gasan is passionately keen on defending the old customs and his friend Murad, who also works at sea, keeps a sharp eye on his younger brother and sister.

True, there is one important point to be made here. Dzhalil-muallim at least practises what he preaches. For instance, he had never been to a dance in his life and before his wedding-day nobody had ever seen him alone with a girl. The young men we meet while the act of vengeance is being carried out are quite different. It seems they care most about the ritual of observing customs and then do exactly what they like when nobody's looking. Gasan, who is reputed to be a shy fellow, accompanies his threats to the "immoral" Dzhangir with the frank admission: "I've also met someone... She's a ticket-collector and a very fine woman but I wouldn't dream of bringing her home!"

As the eldest in the family, Murad decides to marry off his sister to his friend Tofik Askerov. But it so happens that Tofik has come back from a long journey with a young Russian bride. Tofik is happy and really in love with Marina. And Solmaz, Murad's sister, is pleased because she did not want to marry the good-for-nothing her brother had found her. But Murad continues to be friends with Tofik. And a difficult problem crops up because the street looks upon Tofik's action as an insult to Murad's family, which cannot remain unavenged. What is to be done? "Who's going to avenge us for this disgrace?" moans Mu-

rad's mother. "If your father were alive, do you really think this wretch would have dared do such a thing?"

Meanwhile the "wretch" is sitting at home because he is afraid to venture into the street with his wife. Murad secretly visits him late one night. And it is Tofik who convinces his friend that the only thing they can do is to act out the ritual of vengeance in public.

"You've got to punish me! I'll never agree to a stain being left on your honour. I feel sorry for you, too! Everyone's got to see you defend your honour and so this is what we'll do: you'll hit me in such a way that you don't endanger my life."

Murad at first refuses "to put on a farce" just to stop people from gossiping but everything happens, as it were, against his will. The street freezes in tense anticipation when Tofik and Marina leave their house for the first time. Murad moves away from a wall and makes a few steps towards them. "Be a man and hit me!" Tofik implores his friend, trying to get in the right position... And next morning, after giving him a sandwich, unruffled militiaman Mustafa puts under arrest Murad, who has come to him of his own free will.

Some might think that the scene we have just witnessed is just a farce to be appreciated good-humouredly. It doesn't seem so bad when it is merely a question of keeping up appearances. But let's not jump to conclusions yet. After all, we have still got to drop into a corner house where Mamish's two uncles are bringing home to him the centuries-old custom of respecting one's elders and defending the honour of one's family.

Mamish is a tough fellow and has no trouble handling his drill at work but he can do nothing to defend himself against the iron fists of his uncles Aga and Geibat as they chase him into a corner and beat him black and blue. And then in comes his third uncle, who has been waiting in the car. Uncle Khasai, who has a noble head of grey hair and black bushy eye-brows, is the eldest, most important and respected of the three brothers. "How could I, Khasai, consider him one of us, Bakhtiyarovs?! You can expect anything from that nephew. Serves you right, Mamish. You have learnt a lesson. And this is just the start!.."

In order to understand what exactly is happening to Mamish,

we have to know the whole story of the Bakhtiyarov family, which is graphically told by Chinghiz Guseinov. No paraphrase ever does it justice. However, perhaps you will get a better idea of things if I describe the family celebration organised by Khasai to mark Mamish's homecoming from the army where we see the family in all its splendour and glory.

At the head of the long table is, of course, Khasai Bakhtiyarov himself, the son of Giulbala the loader and Melek, daughter of an impoverished former landowner. He started off as a ticket-collector and tram driver but is now a very important person who has achieved everything through his own efforts and hard work. Next to him, by seniority, sits his brother Agabek, "the *shish-kebab* king" in charge of all the city's catering establishments. The place of their sister, Tukezban, Mamish's mother, is empty because as a geologist's wife, she spends all her time travelling with her husband in remote areas. Over the table looms the mighty body of their brother Geibat, the director, and one is tempted to say, the owner of a famous out-of-town restaurant. Then there is another empty place which belongs to the family's pride and joy, Teimur, their brother who was killed at the war and whose memory is sacred. Next comes Khasai's sons Giulbala and Oktai, and numerous nephews among whom, of course, Mamish, the hero of festivities, is seated. "Khasai clasped Mamish tightly to his breast, and as he did so, he at once felt as if their common blood was flowing together, so physically powerful was the bond of kindred between them... 'You are our flesh and blood. I won't say a word against Tukezban. Though she lives like a nomad, she's given our family such a wonderful heir!' "

It is a golden rule in the family to help one another and Khasai has certainly looked after them all well and showered his blessings on them. And neither has he neglected Mamish. But there is another golden rule about respecting the head of the family and obeying one's elders unquestioningly. Although Mamish is only half a Bakhtiyarov, and although he has already seen a bit of the world and is working in a highly-reputed brigade, his people's ancient traditions are still deeply rooted in him. And a lot has to happen for the scales to start falling from his eyes and for him to see everything he has been used to for a long

time in its true light: the constant flow of presents which Uncle Khasai receives all the year round, and not just on festive occasions; the story of Agabek's release from prison and other such things which are family secrets; the hypocrisy which has gradually become part and parcel of the Bakhtiyarovs' family life.

A lot of things have to happen but most important of all is his cousin Giulbala's suicide. Mamish will never forget their last confidential talk when Giulbala told him everything that was seething inside him. Mamish starts feeling furious with himself. "Mamish came to realise he was not so much fixing pipes at work, as stuffing his relatives' ugly gluttonous gobs. He made up his mind to go and tell Khasai everything he thought of him.

" 'Our life is one great big lie!'

" 'Oh, why put it like that? Come on, say what you mean.'

" 'The life of our family.'

" 'In what way exactly?'

" 'In every way!'

" 'And who's to blame?'

" 'You, first of all! And you're also to blame for Giulbala's death!' "

And now we come to the part about Mamish's "crime". He has broken his forebears' law and insulted the head of the family .He stubbornly sticks to his delusions and refuses to apologise to his elders.

Then comes "Chapter Nine, which is the most original in the entire history of Azerbaijanian literature from the *dastan* (folk epic) *Dede-korkut* to the novel about Mamish".

"Sattar was woken up during the night:

" 'Mamish's hanged himself!'

"Tukezban was sent a telegram saying that Mamish was close to death.

"Kyazim received a telegram saying that Mamish had died in tragic circumstances.

"And then Sattar made inquiries and found out that Mamish had been strangled and then hanged so that it looked as if he had done it himself.

"And then Sattar—and only he and nobody else—said of Mamish: 'He only said a little part of what he knew!.. No, he's no

rolling stone, he's firmly rooted in this land which he loved, and in his home town which is so wonderful.

" 'Mamish is part of each and every one of us, just as all of us are part of him.' "

The picture drawn for us by the authors of these novellas is not totally pessimistic. We realise that the power of the patriarchal traditions binding man is neither all-embracing nor eternal, and the heroes of these works are determined to bring them up-to-date in a rational manner. For instance, Dzhalil-muallim's brother, Simurg, already has a completely different outlook on life and Murad's brother, Sabir, angrily protests about the hypocrisy of the people who keep up the antiquated traditions ("That's done it!.. I've put with your stupidity for twenty years...."), and Khasai's son Giulbala and his nephew Mamish "break out" of the Bakhtiyarovs' sombre world. And, of course, their ideas are shared by the writers who are quite categorically opposed to anything that contradicts the principles of the new life and prevents man from being himself.

On the other hand, Soviet writers certainly do not look at the world through rose-coloured spectacles. How very difficult indeed everything is now that once looked as though it could be settled, if not in a few months then, at most, in a few years! After the old world had been moved from its age-old foundation, much of what is known as remnants of the past began stirring and reviving and digging its roots into whatever was left of the soil it used to thrive in; it slowly adapted to the conditions of the new social system, and became entwined in many people's daily lives. And the way to get rid of these old prejudices is to constantly and persistently lay siege to them rather than launch a direct attack.

An extremely vital circumstance, which the heroes of these novellas have to deal with, is their immediate milieu. It would be unrealistic to try and transform this milieu single-handed but one can be sure that man will take a firm stand against any of its inadmissible encroachments on him, and that he will resolutely oppose everything in it that seems false, hypocritical and anti-humane. By reflecting everyday reality and showing what the ideal should be, Soviet literature does much to help and strengthen man's determination and firm stand.

I shall now look at some of the aspects of the literature of everyday life on the basis of Latvian writer Visvaldis Lāms' *A Life Reviewed* (1975) and *Race-Track* (1979), and Lithuanian writer Mykolas Sluckis' *Thirst* (1968) and *Towards Evening* (1977).

The novel in the Baltic republics' literature has developed in a unique manner. As in the literature of the European socialist countries, great epic forms such as the epic novel appeared here during the first fifteen years after the war. And even more distinctly than in Russian literature, the early 60s marked the start of a new stage of intensive creative quests.

The discussion conducted by the journal *Literatura ir menas* in 1960 became a notable landmark in the development of Lithuanian literature. It considered a problem expressed by a critic as creating "a novel with a new form". But what exactly did he have in mind? It was not to be like its forerunners, emphatically objective, multifaceted and built within a framework of social and historical events. When applied to contemporary life, novels of this kind more and more often failed to reach their target. The solution was seen in the creation "of a novel of a new type, depicting the rich complex everyday life of contemporary Soviet man in a broader and more profound manner" (A. Radzevičius).[13]

"The last ten to fifteen years of Lithuanian literature's life have been full of surprises," wrote M. Sluckis at a later date. "Innovations rolled across its horizons like booming thunder. Rushing along its quiet green plains came a torrent, which would never again see its familiar old banks that it had grown out of."[14]

The process described so graphically by M. Sluckis, is defined in not such melodious but very accurate scientific terms as "de-episation" and "increased lyricism". Just like in communicating vessels, when the level of epic artistic consciousness goes down in Soviet literature in general and in Lithuanian literature in particular, the lyrical content of works correspondingly increases.

In Hegel's words, "lyrics occupies a position opposing epic poetry. And whereas for the flourishing of the epic, in the strict sense of the word, we required a national state, which as a whole had not yet developed and matured enough to create prose dealing with reality, lyrics, on the contrary, favours ages in which a

firm order of vital relations has been more or less established for it is only at such times that man (der einzelne Mensch), detached from this outer world, turns inwards reflectively and shuts himself up inside his own inner world, with his totally self-sufficient and integral feelings and ideas."[15]

The objective laws discovered by Hegel in the history of culture proved valid for the future as well. They manifested themselves at a time when the age of the building of socialism was replaced by that of the development of the new formation on its own basis. The more or less "firm order of vital relations" (which art is dealing with at the present stage), has brought considerable changes to man's attitudes to the world, and to the character of his relations with his surroundings; this was also bound to be reflected in the forms art took. What's more, it has been expressed in the way predicted by theory, namely by using less epic elements and correspondingly more lyrical ones.

Visvaldis Lāms' *A Life Reviewed* and *Race-Track* and Mykolas Sluckis' *Thirst* and *Towards Evening* are good examples of the new Soviet novel on contemporary topics. They are lyrical, psychological novels studying the complex interaction of man and the world in everyday conditions. No simultaneous changes take place here in characters and circumstances, as is typical of an epic state of the world. The conditions of man's immediate environment remain virtually the same during the time span chosen by the novelist. That is why the personality's inner development is, as it were, detached from outer circumstances or, at any rate, occurs at its own pace, and is not related to these circumstances in a rigid and direct manner. Consequently, the novel centers not so much on outer events as on inner psychological ones conveying the character and direction of the personality's spiritual development. Writers widely use the technique of the inner monologue enabling them to convey the flow of man's inner life without a formal change in the narrative to the first person.

The Soviet Union, a vast and very diverse country, has one social system and essentially one and the same way of life, but how many different versions of this mode of life are displayed in the national temperament and how many ways there are of expressing emotions! In the novels which have taken in the air and hues of the Baltic plains, you are not likely to meet such ex-

treme characters as the ones we have just encountered, who are capable of the most desperate and violent actions.

After these Azerbaijanian novellas you will be wondering how the new characters will interact with the people surrounding them and to what extent their actions are determined by themselves or influenced by their milieu.

Ārijs Vents left his sister's house when he felt he could no longer stand the set-up in her family and took up the offer of an old craftsman by the name of Indrikis Ēbars to share his bachelor's lodgings. They live together in an apartment somewhere in a Riga suburb and do various odd jobs in the local sanatoria hardly seeing anyone and accounting to nobody for their actions *(A Life Reviewed)*.

A comfortable old Riga house is occupied by the Gudermans family if they may be called a family when each of them lives a totally separate life: there is Rollitis, who made a fortune by stealing things from his factory, his wife, Helga, with whom he is always at daggers drawn, their good-for-nothing son, Berts, and Helga's sister, Ina. Everything goes on as usual until Rollitis' death suddenly affects their fates in various ways *(Race-Track)*.

Romas Alksnys was brought up in a "quiet, but strict and binding family atmosphere" and would appear to be set for a similar quiet, even, and routine kind of life. Regardless of everything, however, he chose the demanding profession of film cameraman and married a frivolous girl called Miglė, and is now plagued with doubts as he struggles to find his way in life *(Thirst)*.

Things also go wrong for the family of the Vilnius surgeon Vincentas Narimantas. He himself is swamped with work of a highly complex and dramatic nature, his wife, Danguolė, dreams of success, attempting in vain to become a film star, and their son Rigas tries his hand at writing but is killed in a car accident before he has time to work anything out in life *(Towards Evening)*.

In these novels there is no such thing as the "street outside" as, for instance, there is in old Baku in Ibraginbekov's novella. For Lāms and Sluckis the town is something where people, living in the same place for years, may not even know their neighbours on the same landing. In everyday life nobody keeps a vigilant eye on people's conduct or sets them rigid moral

rules. So man's inner qualities, which he relies on to choose his way in life and decide which way to act in any situation, are especially important.

Literature about the prosaic side of life has little to do with the circumstances giving birth to an epic "hero with an ideal". And it is not at all surprising that his place has been taken over by the "spiritually alive" man whom we know from the Russian classics. The never explicitly stated but nevertheless obvious aesthetic preferences of the Baltic writers draw a borderline between the heroes living an intense inner life and those who have ceased to develop spiritually and have become set in their ways. The very right to an inner monologue gives almost indisputable proof of the fact that we are dealing with a "spiritually alive" person, who is much more profound than one would imagine, judging by the sparse details of his everyday life.

Naturally, more often than not these people are quite young. There are a lot of them in the above-mentioned novels and they all are very different. Berts the schoolboy goes from fourteen to sixteen during the novel. Rigas is a "shaggy young man" who has already been to several colleges. Romas, a television cameraman, Ārijs, a metal-worker and welder, Ina, a librarian, Aizsils who is in love with her, a driver and then engineer, are all somewhat older. However, each of them has doubts and makes mistakes as he searches for his way in life and, checking his course over and over again, critically assesses himself and his place in the world. "When you're striving towards a goal, you mustn't get distracted," reflects Rigas. "But where on earth is my goal? Where am I? And who am I?" "So what *is* real life and real happiness?" Ārijs asks himself. "What does man need?" "...Take a look around and then listen to yourself breathing and your heart beating, look into yourself and ask yourself what your task in life is and what you love in it, what you hate, what you cherish and what you're trying to destroy. Be honest with yourself, weigh everything up honestly and then honestly pose your questions and find the right answers."

Almost every one of these young people does something which he later regrets. Ārijs, Rigas and Aizsils are all accomplices or, at least, witnesses to criminal acts. Berts watches his father embezzling state property, and sees his friend reacting with downright

cynicism to his father's "fiddles" of a similar kind. "Let the old folks keep slogging... They managed to bring us into the world so they can jolly well manage to feed us..."

The heroes' characters are in the process of being formed and they are inwardly in rather a "mess" *(A Life Reviewed)*. But still they have certain moral principles, something fundamentally wholesome, which prevents them from going astray. True, this is their very first serious choice in life and they still have ahead of them many complex problems, one of which is to decide what should be the purpose of their "slogging", as Berts' friend had put it, what meaning and spiritual content to infuse into their work.

Indrikis Ēbars, to whom Ārijs Vents is apprenticed, "works... fast and very well, does not drink and always sticks to what he says". For centuries all his forebears have had to fiercely battle for their existence, and he still lives in the past. One cannot imagine the Ēbars family "not wanting to work or not being afraid of getting into dire straits". Even in a large collective Indrikis is a mistrustful outsider working on his own and inwardly detached from everything that is going on.

No, work cannot mean the same thing for Ārijs, Aizsils and other young people because they are not haunted by constant fear of hunger and need. And this being so, wouldn't it be logical to assume that work is merely a means of providing comfort and a high standard of living?

Ārijs meets an old friend nicknamed Lord, who has changed beyond all recognition. His newly-acquired country cottage, his car, polished furniture and cut-glass have completely turned his head. Rollitis says affectionately of his car, "This is quite normal for a Latvian family with one child and a car which is its holy god, its one and only holy cow, its idol on wheels, 'no matter how good or bad it is'." After marrying Miglė, Romas gets to know her brother, who is completely obsessed by the idea of being successful in life. And again the attributes of success are a spacious apartment, luxury furniture, a piano, and a car. Rigas derives considerable pleasure from driving round the town in a car he describes as a "chocolate monster", which belongs to his old class-mate Salvinija. Viktoras, another class-mate of his, "sees no point in reflecting about life although he has certainly made

the most of it, what with his ruby ring and fashionable wedge shoes. . ."

These writers do not leave their heroes the slightest illusion as far as this way in life is concerned. Rollitis is not actually caught embezzling but he is punished by having a totally empty life, by his constant fears. And the only way he can relax is by drinking. His other punishment is that he sees his family disintegrating. After his death his wife leads the life of "chilling loneliness".

In V. Lāms' novel *Race-Track,* which we have just mentioned, the young people belong to a motor club which, for many, is "their hope and joy, their lost illusions, excitement, hard endeavour and fierce battle to win". Aizsils and Berts risk their necks on hazardous race-tracks. In Sluckis' novel *Towards Evening* Rigas takes part in cycle races. However, sport today demands much hard work and so does not remain his hobby for long. Rigas justifies himself by saying: "I'm not a professional to have to sweat blood like this."

But what these young people find most hateful and dangerous is the prospect of an ordinary, dull everyday existence made up of petty little chores. "A mire full of fears and apparitions, when you are cut away from the rest of the world within your four walls swollen with boredom and pettiness." That is what Ārijs Vents fears most of all *(A Life Reviewed).* "Knocking, banging, screeching, rumbling. . . The town, like a huge mill, is grinding into dust the minutes and seconds of people's lives" *(Race-Track).* There are powerful transmitters at the television centre where Romas works. Their vibration "goes right through you and you don't even feel it any longer. A slight quiver, petty thoughts and feelings. We get used to everything. How to slip by without getting bogged down in petty intrigues and schemes?. ." *(Thirst).* As Danguolė says to her son, "I'm suffocating. This silent passivity is killing me. Would you believe it, I've started to put on weight! A fat old woman . . . isn't it horrible?" *(Towards Evening).*

Sluckis and Lāms do not promise their protagonists a simple and easy solution to the problems tormenting them. What's more, there cannot possibly be one single solution to them all. Ina in *Race-Track* is happy as she thinks of her future baby. It looks

as if Aizsils sees his credo in the formula "the soul needs to work" and considers that complex spiritual quests are in themselves a promise of happiness.

Some of the characters look upon creative work as a way of escaping the crushing effect of the daily routine. Rigas is only just beginning to try this out *(Towards Evening)*. And so far creative life is only something vague for him, but nevertheless holding the promise of things great and important. Seeking self-expression, his mother Danguolė leaves her husband and son and "ventures into the unknown in search of inspiration, the meaning of life and happiness". Romas, the main character of *Thirst,* gets furthest of all in understanding that creative work is by no means one big holiday away from mundane everyday life.

How to bring out the essence of his work which, above all, cannot stand a lot of fuss and bother? How can he prevent his television reports and feature stories from being mediocre and trite? Romas imagines the many rolls of film waiting for him—"mysterious rolls which are determined to reveal their true meaning to him and to others through him". He wants "to catch the threads slipping through his fingers", to get through the superficial layers to the heart of the matter. However, people's real essence seems to be very fragmentary and elusive, hiding behind all kinds of petty mundane things. From morning till night he meets people that are completely alike, just as men in a crowd. "People who prefer not to think are, in fact, very much alike." "What are they aiming for? The truth, lies, the ideal? All three at once? That's impossible."

The contradictions in Romas' life are in many ways connected with the eternal problems of the way of life he has chosen by deciding to devote himself to creative work. And, at the same time, these problems are very real and develop in definite, realistically described conditions. The prosaic state of the world seen in the intricate backcloth of the novels we have looked at, turns out to be far more complex for solving problems about the meaning of life and a person's place in society than, say, the heroic time of the Great Patriotic War. The main trends determining life's development, the "essence" of things, which the "spiritually alive" heroes are so intent on understanding, are becoming less obvious to the naked eye. Superficial life partly consists of cling-

ing philistine relations and petty ideals, and not everyone manages to shake them off and see what life is really all about. There is now less intensity in the reciprocal exchange between society and the individual when, giving of himself freely, man automatically gained the whole world and reached the zenith of his social self-affirmation.

Judging by what they themselves say on the subject, the novelists of the Baltic republics do not consider the lyrical psychological novel to be the only or principal form of large prose works about contemporary life. They are aware of the difficulties which sometimes crop up and the traps which inexperienced writers sometimes fall into, but they are still convinced that their work, present and future, is shaped by life's requirements and is introducing new hues and colours to the palette of Soviet literature.

At the end of 1971 the literary journal *Voprosy Literatury* held a discussion of Yuri Trifonov's three novellas *The Exchange* (1969), *Preliminary Results* (1970), and *The Long Farewell* (1971), which had become notable events in literary life. An interesting exchange of opinions took place between critics and the author and, to my mind, much of what was discussed, is still of relevance today.

The interviews came under the headings "The Dissection of the Commonplace" and "The Test by Everyday Life". The critics all remarked upon the writer's amazing talent for penetrating deep into the atmosphere of the daily round and for conveying the flow of daily life. Towards the end of the discussion Yuri Trifonov not only did not deny his intentional emphasis on the daily routine but even went as far as to speak in its defence. "The daily round," he said, "is a great test. There is no reason to speak of it in a derogative tone as something seamy and unworthy of literature. After all, the daily routine is ordinary life, a test by life, in which our new morality is displayed and tried out. Relations between people are also part of the daily round. Our daily life has a complex and intricate structure in which an enormous variety of links, views, friendships, acquaintances, dislikes, psychologies and ideologies are crossed. . ."

However, Yuri Trifonov definitely disagreed with the professional critics over another question. During the discussion the

critics said that his "Moscow" novellas about contemporary urban Philistines *(meshchane)* were directed against their way of life and attitudes. The writer thereupon replied that he had nothing of the sort in mind. "The word *meshchane* originally had no negative connotation and simply meant townspeople from the word *mesto* meaning town, place. However, the word's meaning has gradually changed and it now signifies something entirely different, something unpleasant and, to tell the truth, suspicious." And "I repeat, it was not my intention to write about Philistines. It's characters I am interested in. ...Why call Dmitriev's wife, Lena, a negative character? Does she beat her child? Rob a savings bank? Booze with men? Is a lousy worker? No, nothing of the sort, she loves her child, does not drink, adores her family, works most successfully and even compiles a textbook for technical training colleges. She's suited to what she's doing and is of definite use to society. Well, of course, she has a few defects but who hasn't? Are you perfect?" "But then you could reply, excuse me, author, but you are *critical* of Lena, aren't you? Yes, the author is critical of certain Lena's qualities but not of Lena herself: he hates these qualities which are characteristic not only of Lena..."[16]

Quite a few years have passed since then. His three above-mentioned novellas have been joined by two others—*Another Life* (1975) and *The House on the Embankment*. There have been numerous reviews of Trifonov's writing in general and these "Moscow" novellas in particular, but there is something that makes me remember that discussion many years ago and how it became clear that the writer and critics disagreed over one point. And it seems to me that we still have not got completely to the bottom of things here and have failed to understand something important in contemporary literature.

What does the mass of details from the daily round, which has suddenly filled literature, really signify? Are these people, who seem incapable of finding their bearings in life, if it means going against the tide to some extent, are these people Philistines or not?

The mutual relations between these two sources, the daily round and literature, have taken different forms during the country's history.

"Forget the daily round and use symbols. Symbols are longer lasting, more exalted, and more profound than any photographic description of the daily routine."[17] This was how Dmitri Furmanov interpreted his creative mission. Alexander Serafimovich was cited as saying that in *The Iron Flood* he "consciously and intentionally ignored the daily round."[18] Gorky reminded his fellow writers that "the daily round is in constant flux, becoming ever more changeable. . ."[19]

The relative calm lasted only a few years between the two storms—the Civil War and the attack on the foundations of the old world during the first five-year plan. And literature at once noticed the role of the daily round increasing in man's life. The daily round of towns (in its connection with the New Economic Policy that was being executed at the time) was reflected in a great many works of various styles and genres. Among them were Mikhail Zoshchenko's stories, Ilf and Petrov's *The Twelve Chairs* and *The Golden Calf,* and Alexei Tolstoy's *The Viper* and *Blue Cities.* There was also a wealth of literature about daily life in the countryside.

In the late 20s and early 30s "stormy reality" prevailed over writing about the minute details of everyday life and gave birth to a wave of epic art.

In the second half of the 30s socialism became firmly established as a way of life; the theme of man's everyday life again came to the fore in literature. The novelty of Yuri Krymov's story *The Tanker Derbent,* for example, lies, first and foremost, in the way he puts the questions which are really to do with mundane everyday work.

During the war the study of everyday life, which had begun in literature and art, gave way to the epic. As Olga Bergholtz wisely said in one of her verses, at times when daily cares sink into the background, age-old questions of the meaning of life naturally come to the fore. Vsevolod Vishnevsky wrote in his diary: "The daily round? I can neither love it nor depict it. I sometimes force myself to but I really can't. . ."[20]

What conclusions can we draw from these observations? We know for a start that in the course of history the same words "daily round" came to mean very different things. It is sometimes "whipped up" by social storms, becoming transparent, almost in-

visible, but at other times it becomes stagnant and murky. It is then a backcloth for understanding the motives of man's behaviour. Literature reacts to these changes in a very simple and straightforward manner. In extreme conditions of war, revolution and changes of social formations, when daily worries and cares recede into the background, literature and art turn towards the epic. On the other hand, at times when "a firm order of vital relations has been more or less established" (Hegel), art has a tendency to turn towards the non-epic subject of morals and manners and to lyricism, centering upon the image of the "spiritually alive" man, and using more complex means for affirming the aesthetic ideal.

In the 50s pseudo-epic works on contemporary topics were ousted by books re-creating the new reality in an increasingly more concrete manner and in all its diverse manifestations. However, even when the outer restrictions in writing had been resolutely discarded, inner restrictions invisibly continued to influence the degree to which the writer wished to reflect the minute details of everyday life. "Strange as it may seem," noted Soviet literary critic Boris Pankin, "it is apparently 'not done', to write about the things that make up your life. And Yuri Trifonov had to overcome a strange sort of psychological barrier before he was able to see beside him and around him, not somewhere in the Far North or the Far East, a life full of its own problems."[21]

Dmitriev's mother *(The Exchange)* is critically ill and his wife Lena insists they exchange their two rooms for a separate two-room apartment. "Dmitriev could no longer think of anything else as he was standing at the trolleybus stop in the drizzling rain an then squeezing inside between the wet raincoats, and between the coats smelling of damp cloth, knocking his knees against briefcases, and then as he was running down the dirty, slippery Metro steps which had been muddied by thousands of pairs of feet, and then standing in the short queue in front of the cashier's to get some small change for his fare, and then as he was running down more steps, and slipping the coin into the machine slot, and briskly striding down the platform so as to get into the fourth carriage, which stopped directly opposite the arch leading to another platform. . ."

The Exchange and the other "Moscow" novellas are richly

sprinkled with all kinds of details of life, and this is one of their characteristic features. To a certain extent, this added a new quality to the writer's vision and techniques, a new dimension of creative freedom to his reflection of reality. In comparison with his other works, the writer is looking for another tonality and another rhythm of narration. He creates a special "language of the daily round", capable of embodying many details of everyday life.

"The daily round? I can neither love it nor depict it." ...And a definite preference for it... Writers have always had the most diverse attitudes to this subject in their works, and such a range of relations between literature and the everyday routine of life is obviously, in the final count, connected to reality itself. However, it is harder to understand if the characters in Trifonov's novellas are, in fact, Philistines. And here I should like to again remind my readers of the different relations between the same type of hero and life at different stages of history.

The concept of the "superfluous man" in Russian literature certainly did not have the same implications for readers and critics in the 1840s as it did in the 1860s. The restless sufferer demanding due respect lost all sympathy as soon as life opened up even a limited vista for man's social creativity. In point of fact, Tatyana and Pyotr in Gorky's *The Petty Bourgeois* are victims of life's conditions and may count on our sympathy like many of Tolstoy's and Chekhov's heroes before them. However, the "three choices", which Protasov spoke of in Lev Tolstoy's *The Living Corpse,* acquired a new significance on the eve of the revolutionary epoch. And Gorky's Nil, a representative of this epoch, considers Bessemenov's children may not necessarily be to blame for the existing situation but certainly are "people who spoil life".

These analogies may be different but they are all ruled by the same law. An age of social upheaval and an extreme historical situation brought about by various factors sharply increase man's responsibility in choosing between the social alternatives and at the same time noticeably diminish the extenuating role of any kind of objective circumstances, including his milieu and the conditions of his daily life. And, conversely, in a well-regulated life and a firmly established social situation characters and circumstances are interlaced in a much more intricate way and the he-

roes' conduct is evaluated more as a result of their "predicament" and less as their "fault".

Seeing Yuri Trifonov's novellas as an exposure of Philistines, critics do not give enough forethought to this change in historical conditions and in view of this, to the certain shift in stress in the appraisal of characters. And it is this historical approach that Trifonov had in mind when he found some kind words for Lena from *The Exchange,* categorically denying he had any intention of writing about Philistines. By calling Lena a Philistine, one is detaching her, to a certain degree, from the majority of the people around her and arbitrarily stressing her "fault" in the matter by accusing her of being an exponent of a consumer's attitude to life. Trifonov really does not have anything of the sort in mind as he tries to make his readers and critics understand on the example of his novellas that everything, in fact, is far more complex than it seems when ordinary stereotypes are applied.

There is another aspect of the matter without mentioning which we cannot conclude this discussion—the way in which the reality depicted correlates with the aesthetic ideal in literature about the prosaic side of life. And what is it that stimulates, worries and inspires a writer in his study of different aspects of contemporary life?

World literature has been severely tested by the prosaic state of the world—what's more, over a considerable length of time. After being brilliantly expressed in *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote* at the beginning of the 17th century, the contrastive theme of man's boundless potentialities and their limited expression in real life has run all through the history of art of the new age.

In its own way and in different socio-historical conditions, Soviet literature is also now being tested by the prosaic state of the world. If one thinks about it, one will realise that this is what the constant artistic comparison of the two epochs, the past and the present, is all about, and what the problems of creatively assimilating contemporary reality rest on in one way or another.

Events of the past epoch are a constant source of inspiration for writers who, excited by the closeness of the ideal, discover in that epoch and depict people with delusions and weaknesses like the rest of us but also possessing something priceless and

unique: a goal for whose sake they are prepared to lay down their lives, direct contact with circumstances of crucial significance and ability to influence the general course of things.

Then writers and their heroes enter the smooth and relatively calm stream of everyday life as it is today. Thousands of details re-create the outward aspect of a society which has greatly advanced in comparison with the first turbulent decades after the revolution, full of hardships and valour. The problems and conflicts occupying artists reflect the qualitatively different and complex new tasks which society is solving today. What's more, the writer quite often discovers how limited the field of vision and, most importantly, the sphere of activity of his hero are and how confined he is today to circumstances of his immediate environment. And one can sense in everything described by Yuri Trifonov, Rustam and Maksud Ibragimbekov, Mykolas Sluckis and Visvaldis Lāms, this dissatisfying "incompleteness", and the hero's opposition, which he may or may not be aware of, to the lot of a "partial" individual which has been prepared for him.

Now let's take a short trip into the past and listen again to Arkadi's conversation with his father, Versilov, in Dostoyevsky's *The Adolescent*. Arkadi is trying to find out all about the "great idea" he could totally devote himself to.

" 'Why, turning stone into bread is a great idea.'

" 'The greatest? It is true, but is it *the* greatest?'

" 'It *is* great, but not the greatest; it's great only for the moment. When one has had one's fill one forgets it immediately and asks oneself, "What now?" And the question remains for ever unanswered.' "

It is difficult to say whether Vasili Shukshin had this part of Dostoyevsky's novel in mind or not but the words of the hero of his story *Full Face and in Profile* directly echo those in *The Adolescent*. Ivan, a thin, lanky lad with a wrinkled face, is tormented by the question: "...What am I working for?.. Is it really only to get a full belly? All right, I've filled my belly—and then what? That I don't know. What I know for sure is that such a life is not for me. I couldn't work just to fill my belly."

This is a very typical situation in Vasili Shukshin's stories: the hero has a perfectly good idea of what he does not want but a very vague idea of what he does, in fact, want. And what he

does not care for are all the regulations, norms and demands which sometimes seem to exist quite separately from real life and are of a strictly bureaucratic and formalistic nature. Nor does he care for a mundane, routine existence prescribing man a quiet, measured life at home and at work for years to come. Nor does he care for working "just to fill his belly" for purely material comfort. But that is as far as he has thought things out. This is a touchy and generally wilful hero, a "queer fellow" who is constantly inventing a perpetuum mobile and writing projects on how to improve the state of things, boldly posing the eternal question about the meaning of life. Sometimes, however, he does the most awkward and ridiculous things, kicking up a fuss and stubbornly demanding home-truths in the most trifling matters.

And doesn't the same thing, only on a greater scale, happen in Vasili Shukshin's story *Red Gelder-Rose* (about a former thief who unsuccessfully tries to make good)? If only Yegor Prokudin could have been sitting among the courageous outlaws in the prow of one of Stepan Razin's ships, or flying across the steppe in a Red cavalry troop, or destroying bridges in the enemy rear-line... And it's not his being among thieves that has destroyed Yegor: he went astray and ended up being killed because he was utterly unable to accept and fit in with everyday routine and a life that is incomplete. This kind of life torments and puzzles him. He is totally unable to fit in just anywhere, to wake up every day and go to the same office or factory, to till the land or lead a quiet family life. Vasili Shukshin discovered and charted a certain sphere of emotional tension which is expressed in one way or another by the entire literature of everyday life, a literature of moral quests.

The correlations between the aesthetic ideal and reality have proved more complex in the epoch of developed socialism than in that of its formation. And this gives rise to a great many questions which evidently cannot be fully answered yet. A process whereby the state of the world is becoming more prosaic is definitely taking place now, but what exactly is its socio-historical nature? To what extent is this process inevitable? Is it by virtue of the very fact that the society which is only just being formed, opens up unique vistas for creative social activity, giving man unparalleled opportunities? To what extent is this process linked

to the complexities of directing society, and the difficulties of moving along the untrodden paths of historical progress? How can one guarantee absolute harmony in the milieu for generations to come, who will be starting out in life under mature socialism and will be eager to personally participate in the perfection of society? How can one eliminate as much as possible the difference between "developing" and "established" society and turn it into a dynamic self-adjusting organism? How can one transform the lofty but somewhat general and yet remote ultimate goals into a chain of historical tasks, which would inspire society's fervid enthusiasm at all times? How can an epic state of the world be created without the extreme circumstances which it has so far been connected with?

The answers to these questions cannot be found in an abstract or speculative manner but only as one attempts to solve the new socio-historical problems, which are continually being posed.

5. WHAT'S NEW IN THE LITERARY JOURNALS

There is no need to explain what a literary journal is but most foreign readers have only a vague idea of the exceptional role played by these journals in the Soviet Union.

The USSR Writers' Union and its republican organisations publish altogether about one hundred literary journals, mostly in monthly editions, whose total circulation amounts to nearly ten million copies. They include a group of key all-union journals such as *Novy Mir, Druzhba Narodov, Znamya, Zvezda, Yunost* and *Inostrannaya Literatura.* The Writers' Organisation of the Russian Federation also puts out a number of journals such as *Oktyabr, Nash Sovremennik, Sever, Volga,* and *Don.* The other fourteen union republics have their own monthly literary journals in their national languages and one in Russian. One should also mention here the dozens of literary anthologies published all over the country, and the quite unique *Roman-Gazetta,* which comes out in editions of over two million copies.

The editorial office of a literary journal is usually the first

place poets and prose-writers take their manuscripts. Only time will tell whether the work is going to be published as a separate book but in the meantime it comes out in a journal so that the reading public and critics can get a first impression of it. This ramified network of journals greatly increases the chances of new works being published, especially those of young, hitherto unknown writers, and, of course, it helps to increase writers' earnings.

The journals are circulated by subscription and sold retail at stalls and kiosks. They are also sent to the country's 350,000 libraries. The first question people following whatever is new in literature always ask librarians is whether anything interesting has appeared recently in *Novy Mir, Nash Sovremennik, Druzhba Narodov* or any other popular journal. And there are always waiting-lists in libraries for journal issues containing something especially good.

What recent journal publications have caught the reading public's eye and become best-sellers ?

In the last few years Daniil Granin seemed to have given up traditional "objective" prose for good. He has gained the reputation of a writer whose main strength lies in his fusion of documentary facts and his own reflections, which lyrically express his exceptional literary talent. However, not long ago his novel *The Painting* appeared in *Novy Mir* and his readers instantly recognised the style of the author they knew from the novels *Those Who Seek, After the Wedding*, and *Into the Thunderstorm*. The critics, however, crossed swords over this new work.

In a brief and therefore sketchy manner I shall try and give you an idea of the novel's plot. Sergei Losev is elected town council chairman or, in other words, mayor of an old Russian town called Likov. He was born and bred here and therefore has a very good idea of its people's cares and concerns. He is energetic and works hard but, unfortunately, his chances are rather small. There is a housing shortage and problems are constantly cropping up in the municipal services. The town does not have a single large industrial enterprise which could help improve the condition of the blocks of flats and streets. Neither does it have a large building organisation which it could rely on. It looks as if Likov is doomed to stay a quiet and in its

own way pleasant, provincial town for ever since it has no development prospects.

It costs Losev a fair amount of effort to "push" through the ministry and district organisations a motion approving the construction of a branch of a computer factory in Likov. This would provide the key to solving many problems, such as accelerating housing construction, giving young people a chance of interesting work and injecting more enthusiasm into community life. Some forfeits have to be made which Losev considers inevitable at first. For instance, the factory's branch has been designed in such a way that its construction is going to totally alter the town centre. The cosy cottages are to be replaced by standard tower apartment blocks, a historical building is to be pulled down and the river bend known as Zhmurkin Creek, which it is hard to imagine Likov without, is to be changed beyond recognition.

Losev may not be perfect but he is certainly honest and hard-working. Th author is alarmed, however, by the fact that even the character of such a person as Losev may be deformed to a certain extent by the complex system of official work relations and by many circumstances forcing him in his capacity as mayor to manoeuvre and hunt for roundabout ways. The worldly wisdom and experience Losev has gained over the years cannot be regarded merely in a positive light as they have also made him cautious, evasive and adroit at finding excuses even for mistakes and compromises.

And then all of a sudden his line of conduct radically changes. He turns down a prestigious post in the district's administrative centre and although he gets into hot water with his superiors, he sees to it that the future factory is built on the town's outskirts. His main aim is to keep the continuity in the town's history, preserve the original features of this provincial Russian centre and find a harmony in combining the old and the new which is so rarely achieved. And he looks upon this not simply as an architectural task but also an important human and moral one.

How come this down-to-earth, efficient mayor starts defending something as abstract and immaterial as spiritual values? What causes such a highly disciplined administrator to push

aside all other considerations and follow only the dictates of his conscience? The novel is devised essentially to provide the answers to these questions.

It all began when Losev saw a painting in Moscow and succeeded in getting it donated to his town. Astakhov, a renowned artist, had visited Likov in the 20s and done this wonderful painting of the Zhmurkin Creek. Losev puts the painting on display for all to see and it begins to play an important part in the debate about preserving the town centre.

In the history of Russian literature there have been a considerable number of works that showed art's high moral effect on man. Take, for example, the story *The Cure* by the 19th-century writer Gleb Uspensky. The hero of this story is in a state of deep spiritual depression but he is "cured" when he visits the Louvre and sees the immortally beautiful Venus de Milo.

So do we have in Granin's novel yet another version of man being cured by the purifying force of art? No, it's not quite like that. No matter how talented Astakhov's painting might be, it, of course, would not have made such a profound impression on Losev had not it reminded him again and again of the world of his childhood and youth, of that wonderful time when feelings and actions are most natural and spontaneous. Giving in to a very strong yearning, Losev comes to this quiet part of town one morning and wanders barefoot along the sandy spit, thinking of the many generations of boys who, like he, learnt how to swim in the Zhmurkin Creek, caught their first fish and sensed the inexpressible beauty of sunrise and sunset here, on this picturesque spot. One of the advantages of a small town is its relative closeness to nature. Should this closeness be destroyed, then? Isn't it time to draw some conclusions from the many irreparable mistakes which have been made?

This is what Daniil Granin wrote in a journal after he had completed *The Painting:* "I think that one of the writer's most important aspirations in literature is to disturb man's peace of mind, his conscience. Sometimes it's not very easy to get through to it... The conscience is sometimes protected by a great many barriers such as convenient excuses for all cases, gratuitous truths, and shifting the responsibility on other people. It's easier to carry out somebody's orders when you don't have to ask yourself the

irksome question, why and what for. In the novel *The Painting* I wanted to overcome all these 'defensive' barriers in the way of man's conscience."

On the whole, the writer succeeded in his experiment and "got through" to Losev's conscience. But... But, as a reader I still prefer "subjective" Granin and look forward to reading new works in which you can really feel the author's presence throughout.

At the same time as *The Painting*, the novel *Danilov the Viola-Player* of the hitherto little-known writer Vladimir Orlov was published in *Novy Mir*.

After Yuri Trifonov's graphic novellas, writers think a great deal before undertaking to depict the daily round of the Moscow intelligentsia. Nevertheless, this is precisely what Vladimir Orlov did, and did so in a talented and vivid manner. Everything is recognisable in the world around Danilov, a modest orchestra-player in one of Moscow theatres. Firstly, his financial worries (after his divorce from his wife he is paying in instalments for their two apartments and also has to pay back the money he has borrowed to acquire the viola of the illustrious Albani). Then there is all the lavish wining and dining so typical of Moscow with desired guests and sometimes casual ones. And, finally, the talks about the meaning of life, about art and the imperfections of the world, which go on late into the night.

The author's benign ironic tone at times becomes satiric, particularly in respect to the non-existent society, which he brilliantly invents, of people concerned with some of the problems the future has in store. They try, for instance, to forecast tomorrow's demands, shortages, and fashions so that anyone interested can always be ahead of time in following the new trends.

Of course, Orlov's novel would not have won such acclaim if it had been just another novel about the intelligentsia's life. But it so happens that the account of the daily round is here richly interspersed with fantastic elements. Danilov the viola-player, who can never say "no" to his friends, is, in fact, a "demon on salary" who has infiltrated the human world to play all sorts of tricks. He can change from a person into a demon in a trice and then one of his favourite pastimes is bathing in the flashes of lightning.

In a literature which gave the world Gogol and Bulgakov, the technique of using fantastic elements is in itself by no means new. What matters is whether the writer will succeed in adding something original, of his own, to this traditional demonic theme and whether he will justify his reasons for splitting the world into two—the world of dream and of reality. In my opinion, Vladimir Orlov did not make his Danilov a "demon on salary" just to intrigue the reader.

The nether world mirrors common earthly diseases, but the satire is simply complementary. Of the greatest importance is the battle which Danilov is forced to carry on against his "bosses" and which he eventually wins. Everything what happens to the novel's hero in this world and the beyond gradually leads to the triumph of man in him over the demon. Danilov reaches quite a high standard in music with his purely human talents. He is inspired by his craving for creative expression, by his love of a woman, and sympathy and compassion for people.

Soviet critics rightly noted that Vladimir Orlov failed to sustain throughout the book the philosophical level he had intended and that the novel's finale lacked the dramatic qualities needed for a work of this kind. Be that as it may, I still believe that the novel is a noteworthy event in contemporary Soviet literature.

Dramatic and even tragic elements are most prominent in the tonality of Yuri Bondarev's new novel *The Choice,* which was first published in the journal *Nash Sovremennik.* It is a complex philosophical work in which the war time and the present are again joined together and used to set each other off.

Ilya Ramzin, an energetic, determined and successful all-rounder, and his close friend, Vladimir Vasiliev, a more introvert and pensive type, grew up together in the same Moscow house, went to school together and dated the same beautiful girl, Maria. When the war broke out in 1941, both entered an artillery training school and shortly afterwards went off to fight in the same battery. They were together until 1943 when during an unsuccessful night battle the two young lieutenants lost their guns. Ramzin was sent off by his incensed superiors to retrieve them from the Germans and went missing.

Thirty-odd years later something practically impossible happens: Ramzin arrives back in Moscow from abroad, meets Vasi-

liev and the two of them take a walk along the old Moscow streets where they spent their childhood. Of course, they both are now very different. One is Signore Ramzen, a grey-haired Italian businessman, who has come to Moscow to visit his ailing mother, and the other is an illustrious Russian landscape painter, Vasiliev, academician and holder of many prizes.

As in his novel *The Shore,* Yuri Bondarev devotes considerable attention to the past, taking the reader back to the hazardous forties. With his tenacious memory he re-creates a graphic picture of Moscow before and during the war, and of the fierce battles on the western borders of the country. This picture is not, however, dominated by any one colour. Among the many minor characters outlined by the author, there are not only heroes but also scaremongers, cowards and Philistines trying to use the time of national disaster to suit their own ends. However, the general tenor of this time is perfectly clear.

At the outbreak of war both Vasiliev and Ramzin made up their minds without a moment's hesitation; they had a goal which coincided with that of the people as a whole and no adversity could ever undermine their confidence in the Soviet Union's ultimate victory. But then they parted ways.

At a most difficult moment of his life Ramzin chose to be taken prisoner rather than face almost certain death. The other choice he made was to stay in the West after the war. Such was his destiny which now, in retrospect, Ramsin is inclined to blame on ill fate and circumstances beyond man's control.

Vasiliev is in no hurry to condemn his old friend just as the state no longer carries out the letter of the law in cases like his. However, moral judgement is bound to be passed on him and it is indeed seen in the tragedy of his destiny, in his life which has lost all meaning, and in his mother's cold gaze which mortally wounded him when he suddenly appeared before her. It was after this terribly bitter reunion with his mother that Ramzin made his final choice and committed suicide in his Moscow hotel. In the letter he left behind he asked to be buried in Russia and admitted, "I have not left a trace of myself in the world."

The fates of the protagonists could have been directly contrasted, the traitor punished and the patriot rewarded; however, such a straightforward solution would have been out of tune with

Bondarev's gift as a writer and would not tally with his attitudes to reality. Vasiliev's life has certainly not been a bed of roses either although, it would seem, he has achieved everything he set out to. After his reunion with Ramzin, his relations with his wife, Maria, who had once definitely preferred his brilliant friend, became strained. After a tragic incident Vasiliev's daughter is deeply unhappy and sees everything around her in a gloomy light. Vasiliev also has bouts of depression increasingly often when he cannot bring himself to paint. And he begins to have doubts about people, art and inevitably himself.

More than any other work I can think of, Yuri Bondarev's novel cannot be judged simply by the exterior events which take place in it. The constant searchings of a troubled mind are just as important to the novel's plot: Vasiliev's long talks with Ramzin, his arguments with fellow painters, his reflections when he is alone in his studio. I shall not try to convey this aspect of the novel. I shall only say that it is not an idle game when a dubious viewpoint is immediately followed by an indisputable one. The hero works out the truth gradually, through much suffering, constantly going back to square one and sometimes losing his way in a labyrinth of contradictions.

You certainly cannot call *The Choice* a cheeful and optimistic novel, it is dramatic and sombre in tone. One could easily say that this has to do with the moods of its main heroes. Ramzin has come back to Russia to put an end to his unsuccessful life. Vasiliev, a complex creative personality, is seen during a spiritual crisis. In his speech at a Russian Federation Writers' Congress, Yuri Bondarev spoke of artists whose nerves were exposed to other people's pain and who sent messages for help for mankind to hear. Bondarev himself undoubtedly belongs to this category of artists.

Another major work of recent times is Chinghiz Aitmatov's novel *And the Day Lasts Longer than a Century,* which was published in *Novy Mir.* Critics unanimously heralded this novel as one of the most outstanding works of recent years.

A representative of the Kirghizian people, who did not have a written language before the revolution, Chinghiz Aitmatov has been following a literary career for thirty years and is now one of the most eminent Soviet writers. His works have been translated into dozens of foreign languages.

Aitmatov once wrote a brilliant novella about the shepherd Tanabai and his horse Gulsary. The main character of this new novel is a railway worker by the name Yedigei. The writer has a great talent for revealing the fate and inner world of an ordinary man in a profound graphic manner. This world was first explored by Mikhail Sholokhov in his *And Quiet Flows the Don.* Since then the most consistent democratism, including that of psychological analysis, has become a firm creative principle of Soviet literature.

Not only the author's familiar traits but also features new to him are recognisable in his most recent work. He is especially interested in the links of time and the continuity of generations which folk legends and myths have particularly to do with.

A broad and truly cosmic view of the Earth is presented in Aitmatov's novel. The jagged mountains rise high above the clouds, shielding the Hindustan Peninsula. To the north stretch out the vast expanses of the Central Asian deserts and steppes. The following italicised lines run through the novel like a leitmotif:

"The trains in these parts ran from east to west and from west to east...

"Stretching out on either side of the railroad in these parts were the boundless deserts of Sary-Ozeki, the land between the yellow steppes.

"In these parts all distances were measured by the railway like Greenwich Mean Time..."

However, the perspective keeps changing and we are shown one tiny dot in these vast expanses as close as possible: Buranny, a small railway station, where it is forty degrees above zero in summer and forty degrees below in winter. The winds hurl scorching-hot sand in your face and block the railway line with snow. All the water has to be brought in. The settlement consists of eight simple huts and their eight respective families. Their lives are very hard, indeed. The men in oil-stained boiler-suits and the women in brightly-coloured national costumes, the swarthy-complexioned children jumping up and down by rails and following with their eyes long-distance passenger trains as they roar past...

And then while we read something happens which could only have been achieved by true talent: instead of being passengers watching strange and alien scenes from our carriage window,

we get off, as it were, at Buranny Station and start seeing the world through the eyes of its people.

The station's inhabitants are grieved by the death of old Kazangap. He had worked for over forty years at this small station and had won incontestable moral authority among them all. Yedigei decides to bury him in keeping with all the rites at the old cemetery of Ana-Beiit. In the early morning the motley caravan sets off on its long journey with Yedigei on his brightly adorned camel, an excavator on wheels with a cart in tow, and a dog called Zhulbars bringing up the rear. However, it turns out to be a very tough journey as the grounds of the old cemetery are now occupied by a huge launching-site. They end up having to bury Kazangap on a prominent hill in the steppe on their way home. The description of this unhappy and long day provides the base of the novel's plot.

Yedigei's memories give another temporal dimension to the book. They are mostly flashbacks to the first years after the war when Kazangap met and gave shelter to Yedigei and his wife. These were difficult years, full of very hard work. The workers sometimes dropped from exhaustion, clearing the snow-bound railway line with their spades. A fine man by the name of Abutalip, a former teacher who had worked on the railway like all the others, was accused on a false charge and arrested. He died shortly afterwards. Yedigei's hopeless love for Abutalip's widow Zaripa adds a plaintive note to the novel. With Yedigei's active assistance, Abutalip's reputation is redeemed but his widow Zaripa and her children have already left for an unknown destination. This was Zaripa's decision for she couldn't think of breaking Yedigei's family life.

Yedigei carries the distant past in him. He loves listening to old Kazakh songs and knows a great many legends by heart. And, indeed, there is nothing fortuitous about it for it is an integral part of his character and attitudes. Nothing in the world vanishes without a trace, all ages interflow, leaving behind something intransient and eternal. Living without remembering the past is tantamount to stealing from oneself and becoming an unresponsive and passionless *mankurt*.

It's no good looking the word *mankurt* up in a dictionary because before Aitmatov's novel it did not exist in the Russian lan-

guage. Now, however, it comes up in conversations and is a generally recognised term in critical articles. It comes from a legend which is particularly important for an understanding of the novel.

In the distant past these steppes were ruled by fierce conquerors who turned some of their prisoners into slaves by a particularly brutal means of torture. They would pull a moist camel's skin over the prisoner's head and as it dried in the sun, it shrank, causing agonising pain. The prisoner either died or became a *mankurt,* a being without memory, who carried out his master's commands unquestioningly. The legend tells of how one mother found her son, who had been turned into a *mankurt,* and tried to awaken his memory but died at his hand. Her name was given to an old cemetery and her kerchief flew up into the air and turned into a holy bird...

On his way back home after burying his old friend, Yedigei was astounded by the sight and the deafening roar of rockets taking off, one after the other, from the launching pad. He was, in fact, witnessing the end of a drama which neither he nor anyone else in the world was ever to find out about.

Two astronauts—one American, and one Russian—had disappeared from the Parity space station. It turns out that they have been in contact with representatives of another civilisation. This modern legend is added by the author to those that have reached us from the distant past.

Chinghiz Aitmatov's success was guaranteed by his vivid and powerful portrait of an ordinary working man. Of course, Yedigei has not had much of an education and knows little about what is going on in his country, let alone in the rest of the world, but he has natural intelligence, great experience of life and firm convictions. He knows that everything worthwhile is only got through honest toil; he believes in goodness and the eventual triumph of justice, and does all he can to bring that day nearer.

To use the writer's own graphic expression, Yedigei is not only a worker by virtue of his trade but also "a person with an industrious soul". His thoughts and feelings work hard as he actively interprets and lives through everything fate brings his way. And that is why this central character lives up to his demanding part in the novel.

All the works mentioned so far in this section were published in 1980. The following year saw considerably fewer "best-sellers" for the publications mostly comprised novels and novellas particularly of interest to critics and readers with a specialised knowledge of literature.

Druzhba Narodov published a Russian translation of Margers Zarinš' novel *The False Faust*. The publication immediately attracted interest because Zarinš is a well-known Latvian composer. His first prose work saw the light in 1970, when he turned sixty, and since then he has convincingly proved that the second creative profession he chose in his later years has by no means been a waste of time.

The year is 1930, the setting—relatively quiet bourgeois Latvia. In a small provincial town a retired apothecary by the name of Janis Vridrikis Trampedach is whiling away his old age. He considers the main achievement of his life to be a revised cookery and housekeeping book published fifty years previously. He receives a visit from an impoverished student and travelling musician called Christopher Marlow, who makes him an amazing offer: he, Marlow, will rejuvenate the honourable apothecary and make all his secret dreams come true if Trampedach, in return, will allow him to work on a new re-edition of his cookery book.

They strike a bargain. Stimulated by various drugs, the apothecary and his companion set off for Riga where they make a study of the town's "live spots". Next the new Faust finds himself a Margaret, by the name of Marguerita Šella, who is fished out of the river by Trampedach while trying to drown herself. However, the idyll does not last long. Trampedach, who is half-German, becomes an active supporter of Latvia's Germanisation. In a fit of jealousy he kills Marguerita, wounds Marlow and ends up as the commandant of a nazi concentration camp.

The force of Margers Zarinš' book lies in its idiomatic language, polished style, lavish literary reminiscences and the profound manner in which it conveys the subtle feelings of Marlow as a musician. Zarinš is a brilliant master of subtle irony which enables him to avoid direct character sketches in his depiction of the life of pre-war Latvia. The gallery of vacuous public fig-

ures, ignorant nouveaux riches and petty "leaders of the people" speaks for itself.

Another work published by *Druzhba Narodov* was Yuri Trifonov's novel *Time and Place*. It was the last work of the prematurely deceased writer and so naturally attracted attention.

The novel's action runs from the 30s to the present. It is set in Moscow, in its parks and avenues, its old side-streets and modern suburbs. Its central hero is Alexander Antipov, who has passed a long and arduous road in his career as a writer.

The novel does not have a well-defined plot. The first chapters contain descriptions of Moscow before and during the war, followed by a narrative about the everyday life of the students of the Literary Institute in the post-war years. (His first novel *Students* dealt with the same subject.) Antipov, the main character, does not have a permanent place to live in and frequently changes digs, writing a lot and getting to know the far from ideal literary morals and manners. Later on, nearer the present, we see him living with his wife and two children and writing a book about an unsuccessful writer (and we are shown excerpts from his book). It takes Antipov years to realise that he himself is a failure. "I didn't make it, probably because I'd taken up something I wasn't up to," said Antipov. "I didn't have it in me, if you know what I mean. I can't go the whole hog. But you've got to. You've got to get right to the roots. I realised that towards the end, when it was too late." A few more years go by, which are by no means Antipov's happiest. He grows old prematurely, feels lonely, has a heart attack and tries to start from scratch...

In his last novel Yuri Trifonov again showed his consummate skill at solving complex literary problems. The wealth of details and the writer's tenacious, alert memory are truly astounding. All the same, *Time and Place* does in some ways repeat his other writings and merely finishes off subjects which he felt he had treated somewhat superficially in his other works. Post-war literary life, which was much more interesting and bounteous, is shown here by Trifonov from a very narrow viewpoint.

Another posthumous work, Lev Ginzburg's novel *Only My Heart's Broken*, was published in *Novy Mir* in 1981.

Lev Ginzburg is known as the author of the anti-fascist journalistic works *Abyss* (about the trial of war criminals) and *Encounters in the Other World* (about encounters with the heads of the nazi Reich living in the West). His life's main work was, however, his translations of German poetry. One may judge the scale of his work by an anthology which came out several years ago under the title *German Poetry. From the 10th to the 20th century.*

"What are these records about?" asks Ginzburg in his short introduction to the novel. "Discussions about a poetry translator's work? Memoirs? A series of literary and everyday novelettes? That I find hard to reply to... I found the life of a translator of poetry which had been created a thousand years before his time to be very suitable material for observation... By virtue of his sheer vocation he is obliged to imbibe the culture, ideas and experience of hundreds of years and he has also got to present, as it were, his own little private human ego, which has been formed by his epoch, to eternity, to the constant flow of history."

It is a confessional work describing the author's development as a man and a writer, showing his anxieties over the past years. It is also a piece of research introducing us to the poetry translator's creative workshop and giving us some idea of the hundreds of years of European history.

Lev Ginzburg started his narrative with the mediaeval romance *Parsifal* (1200-1210) by Wolfram von Eschenbach. We suffer, as it were, the pains of creation along with the translator searching for the keys to this work, which is so far-removed from us. However, the distance in time vanishes as soon as the work's vital message becomes clear to us: its moral maximalism, paean to active goodness and longing to battle for all the humiliated and suffering. Further on there is a detailed story about the poets of the Thirty Years' War who sought for words of grief and consolation in the face of death, in the smoke and flames of burning European towns. The author gives us a vivid idea of the mediaeval wandering minstrels whose bold songs reflected the people's immortal soul. Ginzburg's description (and his translations) of Schiller, whom we now see without the usual gloss of a reader, open up unknown facets in the famous

German poet and dramatist. The author is continually returning to the present and showing us the continuity of the history of mankind.

Over the last three years *Znamya* has been publishing instalments of Alexander Chakovsky's long novel *Victory,* which has also appeared fully in recent issues of *Roman-Gazetta* and come out as a separate book. Its vast edition is fully justified by its demand.

Chakovsky chose a complex and dramatic moment of modern history for his work. The war against fascist Germany has just come to an end and a considerable part of Europe is lying in ruins. The "Big Three"—the representatives of the USSR, USA and Great Britain—have met in Potsdam near Berlin to decide the fate of the post-war world. Roosevelt has died recently and been succeeded by Truman. During the conference itself Churchill loses the elections at home. The USA exploded their first atomic bomb and got ready to deal a lethal blow on the towns of Japan. The anti-Hitler coalition of the Great Powers was going through its last months. Soon there would be a sharp change in the West's policies, resulting in a confrontation with the Soviet Union and the start of the long cold war.

And here we are in Cecilienhof Palace in Babelsberg on the outskirts of Potsdam where Stalin, Truman and Churchill (succeeded by Attley) met one another for two weeks. There were many issues on the agenda including the fate of Prussia, the size of Germany's reparations, the statute of the Black Sea straits, the admittance of Germany's former allies to the United Nations... Behind all this lay the Soviet Union's and its Western allies' conflicting views about the post-war fate of Germany and the future of the East European countries, which had been liberated by the Soviet Army.

Chakovsky called his work a "political novel". It is based on documents of the conference and accurately re-creates the course of the discussion. However, this merely provides the basis for its fictional and journalistic material. The positions and viewpoints of the three allied countries are expressed by individuals whose characters, temperaments and political experience come into conflict at the Potsdam Conference. There are unexpected twists and turns, forced compromises and moments of

crisis. The writer reflects the dramatic tension of this meeting with great skill and enables his reader to look at the course of events through the eyes of each of its participants in turn.

There are fictitious characters in the novel as well as real historical ones. Among them is Mikhail Voronov, a Soviet journalist sent by a Soviet press agency to Potsdam. Of course, being depicted next to such famous figures as Stalin and Churchill, with their striking personalities, is not to a fictitious hero's advantage. Voronov's character is somewhat "cardboard" and at times too openly serves as the mouthpiece of the writer's views. However, his presence does enable Chakovsky to enlarge the narrative's frame by showing the situation around the Conference and drawing pictures of life in defeated nazi Germany.

The chapters of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in July 1975 are perfect as the book's epilogue. Voronov, who is present at this unprecedented political forum, cannot help comparing Potsdam and Helsinki in his mind. It was particularly apparent in Helsinki how the world had changed over the last thirty years. There is a confident ring to the voices of the representatives of the socialist countries, which initiated the Conference. The inviolability of the European borders established at Yalta and Potsdam was confirmed and seeds of mutual understanding and cooperation were sown. The shoots of these seeds have, however, been fiercely trampled underfoot by certain politicians in the 80s...

At this point I shall end my brief survey of the latest works which have appeared in Soviet journals, including essay novels, political novels, and philosophical fantastic and socio-psychological novels. They testify to the scope of the Soviet writers' creative quests and uniqueness of their individualities. All this has to do with the diversity of literature whose social and aesthetic bases we shall now try to explain.

6. THE DIALECTICS OF UNITY AND DIFFERENCE

For all its inevitable digressions, the main task of this work has been to compare and contrast the Soviet classics and contemporary Soviet literature, seen as two stages of literary devel-

opment. I have analysed the typological changes in literature linked to the transition from the first stage of the new social formation's development to the next. I have tried to constantly keep tabs on the interaction of characters and circumstances in the past and present, in the town and village, in modern industry and, generally, in everyday life.

Now I must sum up everything that has been discussed over a great many pages and take a special look at the dialectics of unity and difference in the history of Soviet literature.

I have decided to make a summary table which, I hope, will give you a better idea of the inner development of Soviet literature. On the left side of this table you will find the specific features of the literary process from the 20s to the 40s and on the right, from the 60s to the 80s.

The Diversity of Literature

20s-40s	*60s-80s*
The general tendency throughout this period is centripetal. Literature becomes increasingly unified, ideologically and typologically, by virtue of the fact that there is no longer such a disparity between writers' ideological and creative positions and the levels of developments of the national literatures.	The general tendency is towards an increase in the creative diversity of literature. In the final count, this is a sign of the wealth and diversity of cultural life in a mature socialist society and the growing variety of the Soviet people's aesthetic needs.

The Interaction of the National Literatures

An intensive process in the course of which multinational Soviet literature is formed: the historically conditioned disparities between the level of national literatures' development are eradicated; there	Soviet literature functions as a harmonious community of national literatures, written in 77 languages of the peoples of the USSR; the literatures develop at a relatively even rate throughout the

is a wider mutual acquaintance with the best models of prose, poetry and national art; new written languages are created and young literatures rapidly develop. Progress of literature on a country-wide scale is mostly determined by works written by Russian authors and those belonging to the other more developed national literatures.

country; literatures, large and small, old and young, mutually enrich one another; new vistas are opened up for any of the national literatures to create remarkable works that would contribute something genuinely new to socialist culture.

The Specific Typological Features of Literature

The transition from one formation to the next gives rise to the epic state of the world. Literature is of an increasingly more epic character: the dominance of large genres such as the epic novel; depiction of "volcanic history" whose movement determines the composition of works, and the nature and outcome of depicted conflicts; the mutual relations between the character and circumstances are mostly of an epic quality, in the face of which the hero directly influences circumstances of a widespread and universal significance; there is a visible tendency to directly affirm the aesthetic ideal.

Although an acute struggle continues between the two political systems in the international arena, the Soviet people enjoy a relatively peaceful, "routine" period in their home life. Literature undergoes another typological change whereby the epic content of works decreases and their lyrical element increases; the genres are more diversified and form a harmonious system; the role of literature about the prosaic side of life increases where the hero has dealings with circumstances of a relatively limited significance; on the whole, the aesthetic ideal is expressed in literature in a more diverse, complex and indirect manner.

Attitudes to Traditions

Rejecting realism of the Chekhovian type; the socialist realist method and critical realism are contrasted; a trend is apparent to follow Shakespeare and use traditions of the epic art of the past.	A considerably wider range of literary trends attracting writers' attention; active assimilation of the traditions of Dostoyevsky and Chekhov; new heightened interest in "peripheral" Soviet literature of the 20s to 30s.

The Accessibility and the National Character of Literature

A powerful drive (the fifth in the history of Russian literature) towards the mass reader; the historic task of putting art within reach of the working people is accomplished; a most consistent democratism of aspirations, content, form and language in literature. The October Revolution, socialist construction projects and the Great Patriotic War are depicted as the heroic deeds and historic accomplishments of the people.	The development of literature's close ties with the people coincides with changes both in the people (universal literacy, a high standard of education, urbanisation and an improvement in living standards), and in literature as it solves new tasks. Literature's attention is focused on the individual regardless of his social role or profession, and not only on eminent heroes and characteristic social types of the time.

The comparison has been made on different parameters but they often intersect. And it seems to me that the most important issue embodying them all in some way or other is that of the *diversity of literature*. So I should now like to speak about it in more detail.

Now, what are the objective social and aesthetic sources of the diversity of Soviet literature of the 20s? Why did this diversity in its former concrete historical shape begin to recede, and failed to stand the test of time?

The October Socialist Revolution caused a very sharp demar-

cation of people in the arts. Writers who did not accept the revolution mostly emigrated. However, a most complex spectrum of ideological positions and emotional responses to the new reality was also felt "inside", ranging from the enraptured "cosmism" of the proletarian poets to the bitter scepticism of "the heretic from Philistine Row", as critic A. Voronsky called Yevgeni Zamyatin. The literary schools which had emerged before the revolution, had their own vision, and understanding of the revolution's ideals and goals, and also of the ways in which it could be reflected in works of literature. Young artists, searching for and trying themselves out in the most varied directions, saw as a stumbling block things we now find quite elementary (such, for instance, as the attitude to the cultural heritage and the proletarian character of the new literature). Overcoming considerable difficulties, delusions, and errors, socialist art slowly but surely crystallised and gained new strength.

The most authoritative document testifying to the diversity of Soviet literature in the mid-20s is the resolution of the RCP(B) Central Committee of June 18, 1925, on Party policy in the sphere of literature. It notes and characterises, first and foremost, literature's *class* diversity in view of the specific features of the historical situation.

It states that in the sphere of literature a leading role is undoubtedly played "by the working class as a whole with all its material and ideological resources". However, "so far there is no hegemony of proletarian writers" and the Party must help these writers to gain their historical right to such hegemony.

As far as peasant writers are concerned, everything must be done "to put their growing numbers on the track of proletarian ideology". It warns of the need for a tactful and considerate attitude to the so-called "poputchiki" (fellow travellers), namely, "an attitude which would give them every opportunity to adopt communist ideology as quickly as possible".

It concludes by saying that the class struggle is not ceasing on the literary front either.

The assessment of the situation in literature given by this document from a social and class viewpoint is not simply a tribute to the ideas and terminology of the time. The revolution had not yet celebrated its tenth anniversary, and the Russia of the New

Economic Policy had not yet become socialist Russia. One also, of course, had to take into account the class origin of the writers who brought definite social experience of their own into the literature of great revolutionary change.

The resolution of the CC RCP(B) did not issue from this real situation in order to perpetuate it. On the contrary, it was aimed at *overcoming* the social and class stratification of literature, which had come about in the course of historical development. The task formulated in the resolution was to ideologically win the intelligentsia over from the bourgeoisie. The resolution proceeded from an optimistic, essentially Leninist approach to the question, namely, that the class origin of a writer does not prevent him from assimilating working-class ideology. It stated that while freeing itself of anti-proletarian and anti-revolutionary elements (which were now quite rare), and contending with the ideology which was being disseminated by the new bourgeoisie among a section of the "poputchiki", the Party had to be tolerant to intermediate ideological forms, patiently helping these inevitably numerous forms to be gradually eliminated in the course of ever closer comradely cooperation with the people in the arts supporting communist ideals.

Thus, the diversity of Soviet literature at the time of its formation was primarily of a class nature, reflecting the highly stratified social reality of those days. Literature had "intermediate ideological forms", which were by no means hostile to the new system but failed to apprehend the socialist ideals. The Party's directions on overcoming these "intermediate forms" and on attaining the ideological and creative unity of the artistic intelligentsia were effective precisely because they corresponded with the inner requirements of literature and art and were in line with the actual course of events.

At the beginning of the century fundamentally different types of relations between man and the world gave rise to deep typological disparities in literature. The "alienated" individual totally dependent on the hostile world provides the epistemological basis for the development of decadent trends in art. The "private" individual created by the immediate circumstances of his life is the social and aesthetic mainstay of the literature and art of critical realism. "Creative" man, who enjoys active relations

with the world, is the leading hero of Gorky's works and the subject and object of socialist realist literature.

The process which deeply affected the typological stratification of art consisted mainly in overcoming during the socialist revolution these different types of relations between man and the world and of bringing the world outlook of "creative" man into the foreground. From the 20s to the 40s artists began to exceedingly appreciate the heroic state of the world, which was so much in keeping with the aesthetic ideal, and seemed more and more truly "theirs". And this was also felt in the increased epic content of art and in the developed system of literary devices for conveying the dynamic picture of the movement of history, the beauty of man as creator of the new world and the drama of the profound reorganisation of social relations.

At the beginning of the 50s a new tendency appeared in Soviet culture : literature and art became more diverse in keeping with the conditions and demands of the developed socialist society. It is up to theoreticians to determine the nature of this qualitatively new diversity and discover its origin.

The object of our analysis is thousands upon thousands of works published in literary journals and separate editions; but how should we approach this vast number of books comprising literature? What angle should we choose in our research ?

Strictly speaking, the reader has access to a far more diverse literature, by no means confined to the books written in this country today. I mean all the books by foreign authors, the classical works of the different peoples of the Soviet Union and all the works written in the Soviet period of our history. All these branches intersect and merge into the stream of the modern literature.

Now I shall narrow the sphere of my analysis by extracting contemporary Soviet literature from this wealth of reading matter. Can one say that this literature is all of the same quality and aesthetic significance? No, of course not. Quality is naturally another essential criterion when analysing literature's diversity.

The proportion of published books to stand the test of time and keep their literary and cognitive value for future generations

is alarmingly low. Besides a few immortal works in literature there always have been and always will be a great many books which, as one discovers later, are destined to be read only by their contemporaries. This phenomenon is especially interesting for literary historians, critics, sociologists and psychologists.

Hardly anyone would venture to grade these current books according to their quality, writing some off as marked-down goods and hallmarking others. However, at least three grades can in fact be made in theory and practice. The first grade comprises books bearing the hallmark of excellence and talent, revealing new aspects of reality, contributing something new and valuable to the literary process. The second comprises fiction which is at times far from mediocre but is essentially based on various models of the past or obviously intended as light reading. The third comprises literature which, strictly speaking, should not be classified as belles-lettres at all. It includes a miscellany of pseudo-poetry, pseudo-novellas and novels.

Repeated drives to eliminate the third grade and curtail the second have not made any appreciable effect. Radical measures which would affect a large number of writers (such as, say, considerably reducing the number of books published while increasing the editions) prove hard to implement. And, anyway, who is to say that such harsh measures might not worst affect the young writers whose first books are sometimes not very good, to put it mildly?

On the basis of their research some librarians and sociologists have made a survey of present-day readers which gives much food for thought. There are, it appears, readers of a rational kind who expect books to give them first of all information about various events. Consequently, they prefer memoirs, historical novels and documentary fiction. There are readers of an emotional kind who are most interested in narratives about love, friendship and family dramas where they can find comparisons with their own lives. And only a very small minority of readers (and, what's more, not only from the intelligentsia) was graded by the researchers as "ideal". Only they are capable of making thorough and aesthetically competent appraisals of works. Without losing their spontaneity of reaction, they do not forget for a minute that all this is the author's invention, they spot and duly

appreciate the originality of his language and style, perceive the book's intention and discern the writer's position, which is not always explicitly expressed.

The fact that writers have an edifying effect on readers is something you learn early on at school. It's less well-known that readers also educate writers in their own way. At any rate, complex direct and inverse links which have still to be fully elucidated, exist between writers and readers: demand gives rise to supply, the typology of writers more or less coincides with that of readers; new works gradually develop new interests and tastes. The diverse reading public, and the differences in their requirements explain to a high degree the diversity of literature.

Let us forget for a while the differences in the quality of literature and the reader's standards of appraisal, and deal only with the diversity of genuine literature and of perhaps not ideal but at least sufficiently competent readers. As far as diversity is concerned, how are these readers and this literature correlated at this point in time ?

Firstly, in what ways does the Soviet reader of today differ from his counterpart of the 20s to the 40s? The answer is to be found in his *high education level.* Three quarters of all the people working in the national economy now have at least an incomplete secondary education. The number of mental workers in the country is the same as that of collective farmers. Almost one and a half million people have science degrees.

Does this rise in the standard of education mean that aesthetic interests and tastes are gradually becoming uniform? Certainly not. In fact, the reverse is true: it is only on the firm base of general education that man is able to reveal his own creative talents and clearly differentiate the quality of works of literature and art.

The second basic difference in the reading public today is that they mostly live *in towns,* which, according to sociological research, are much more "pluralistic" than villages. In other words, something may serve as a model for one person, and not for another, and the interests of different people vary as much as they do themselves.

Finally, there is one other important point to be made here. Socialism was built in special, extreme conditions which demand-

ed the concentration of all of society's efforts at each stage on the solution of some one important task. In its own way this also concentrated Soviet people's interests as readers of literature. Nowadays the reader lives a regular working life. And so, fundamentally, there cannot be one particular literary subject which interests the reading public more than others for indeed only the richest spectrum of literature can meet their most diverse demands.

The increasing role of literature and art in contemporary life may be explained to a great extent by the fact that at their present stage they are developing and fulfilling their specific potentials and various social functions more fully than before, gaining access to different sections of readers and audiences and helping to identify and solve a great many problems of social development each of which in its own way plays an important part in accomplishing the Soviet people's aims and goals.

Having explained the objective need for the ever-increasing diversity of contemporary Soviet literature, I shall now try and examine what this diversity is *really like*, without, of course, forgetting what caused it in the first place.

Any unbiased researcher of Soviet literature is always astounded by its unique *national diversity*.

But what was this national diversity like in the 20s? It was, firstly, to be seen in the standards achieved by different groups of literatures and in the traditions which they followed. Throughout the epoch in which socialism was established, steps were taken to overcome this historical disparity in the aesthetic standards and possibilities of national cultures. This period was marked by the most fruitful discovery of new names and artistic gems which had been stored by different nations. It was a process in the course of which nations learnt from one another and there emerged new written literatures which gradually assimilated the vast range of modern creative devices and means.

The national diversity of Soviet literature today is of a different quality. Dozens of literatures, large and small, are now developing simultaneously and actively interacting with each other on an equal footing. Nations which only a short while ago did not even have a written language, today have a literature employing 20th-century modes of expression. The most amazingly varied

conditions of life, traditions, customs and habits have been "franchised" in literature and art. We witness today many different combinations of national traditions and imagery systems in which elements are balanced, and harmoniously adapted in keeping with the inner demands of each literature.

In the 70s it became especially evident that the process whereby national literatures interacted, which had been historically tested in the conditions of the Soviet Union, was being repeated, in its main features, in all the other socialist countries. Thus, it was also established that the initial stage of mutual acquaintance was over and a new stage of closer creative cooperation had begun between these literatures. This meant the experience of one literature would give greater scope to another and that there would be similar quests to solve common ideological and aesthetic problems of our literatures. This fraternity of literatures is another objective cause for the increasing creative diversity of the socialist arts.

One of the most characteristic features of modern Soviet literature is its *typological diversity.*

As the reader will remember, I have already explained how Soviet literature underwent a typological change after the revolution. At that stage literature was not confined to epic realism but its tendency to develop in the direction of the epic was quite evident.

What is the situation like today? One of its notable features is that both literature and art rely simultaneously on two epochs, that of developing and mature socialism, and on two states of the world, which in Hegelian terms are known as "heroic" and "prosaic". Epic realism proved incapable of embracing both these epochs and of becoming the aesthetic key to depicting modern reality. A need was felt to elaborate means of indirectly affirming the aesthetic ideal and of reflecting the more complex and contradictory relations between man and the world, between characters and circumstances. This explains the new and, to some extent, inverse typological change which culture has undergone in the direction of "critical" realism (bearing in mind that this old definition cannot convey the full meaning of the process and is used conditionally). On the whole, the originality of the present stage lies in its use of the widest range of means and devices

for re-creating reality in an artistic manner. On the one hand, we have epic panoramas of society in its development and, on the other, profound lyric works; we have detailed documentary and political novels and films, and also introspective works showing the processes going on in the microcosm of man's inner world.

This typological change of literature that we have just mentioned was naturally accompanied by a change in its reference-points in the culture of the past. The literature of the 20s to the 40s avoided writing about morals and manners characteristic of 19th-century realism, and looked further afield, to Shakespeare and further still, to the traditions of the heroic folk epic with its collectivist morality conveying the indissoluble unity of man's fate with that of his people. On the whole, the literature of the 60s and 70s has broader views in its approach to the traditions of the past but one of its chief models is certainly Chekhov. Bunin's compact, talented realism has also been highly appraised. Andrei Platonov, Mikhail Bulgakov and a few other writers of the early twentieth century have also become more popular.

An intensive study of the traditions of classical realism, which pays great attention to the details of man's life and is very skilful in psychological analysis, makes up one of the characteristic features of the modern literary process. We saw this in the case of a number of prose works but it is equally true of poetry. As one poetry critic writes, "In the 60s poetry's proximity to traditions and time-tested aesthetic values became more manifest than before. By the end of the decade this tendency was predominant."[23]

I should note, however, that this is true only in the most general terms. There naturally cannot be a complete return to the past. Just as the epic of the 20s to the 40s was a contemporary epic, which had gone through the school of 19th-century realism, so the realism of the 60s to the 80s is a contemporary realism, which has assimilated the achievements of the Soviet classics and discoveries of great 20th-century writers and artists.

The genres of literature and art are, as is well known, joined by the tightest bonds, existing and changing as parts of a general system and not in isolation. In the 20s to the 40s this system changed in favour of sweeping epic genres. In the transitional

50s the need for art to discover the new reality and master new characters and situations gave precedence to the genres of the short story and essay. Conditions in the 60s to the 80s facilitated the steadier and more harmonious development of all literary genres. The novel dominated in the literary interpretation of the age of the revolution, socialist construction, and the war. The novella proved more in keeping with present-day moral and psychological subjects. As a whole, though, literature does not have one particular dominant genre (and cannot have in present conditions): each of the genres is essential in its own way, enabling the writer to solve the creative tasks at hand more successfully.

The writers who took part in the First All-Union Writers' Congress, as you may remember, complained about the limited means of literary expression they had inherited, and spoke of the traditional genres being "melted" when they came into contact with the new reality. It is interesting to note that genres are also permeating one another, "melting" and being transformed in their own way in present-day literature.

"As for genres, literary theoreticians aren't yet able to work out what genres many prose works of the last quarter of the twentieth century are written in.

"And writers do not know this either.

"I have called the genre of this work 'a novella-journey'..."

This excerpt comes from the beginning of Victor Konetsky's *Yesterday's Worries* and one has to agree with him. In a great many instances the usual genre categories really do fail to cope with the influx of strange genre forms which are sometimes hybrids and sometimes like nothing else at all.

Valentin Katayev, for instance, has made matters much worse for the critics. What can you call *The Toy Cube, The Grass of Oblivion, My Diamond Crown* and other of Katayev's more recent works? Novels? Novellas? Essays? Memoirs? Documentary prose? They are, in fact, all five plus something special which cannot be put under any genre-category. Things that actually happened have been blended here with things that happened in the writer's imagination. The present is part of the past and the remote past is conveyed in the future tense in the most extraordinary way...

Daniil Granin sometimes poses problems like this, too. For a

long time he was writing "normal", objective novels and novellas and then along came *The Moon Upside Down*, *The Garden of Stones*, *This Strange Life*, and *Return Ticket*, which defied all genres.

And what can you call Victor Astafiev's *Queen Fish?* "What we have here is not only a diary," wrote one critic, trying to solve this enigma, "although, perhaps, *Queen Fish* really did start off as a diary with lyrical and journalistic elements. And Astafiev, directing himself inwardly towards a confession, freed himself of genre ties of various kinds which gave his journalistic work a broad philosophical connotation."[24]

In the above-cited passage, let us take particular note of the two phrases "directing himself inwardly towards a confession" and "freed himself of genre ties". In my opinion, what we have here is the cause and effect of the literary phenomenon we are examining. Confessions are very characteristic of a considerable part of modern literature for they enable writers to be confiding, utterly sincere and truthful in their narrative and satisfy their powerful aspiration to "get to the roots" as far as understanding themselves and others, and formulating the problems alarming them are concerned. And this supreme task takes precedence over any formal canons as soon as the latter start limiting the writer's creative freedom in any way, standing between him and his reader or impelling him to follow a course his restless creative spirit does not wish to follow. As a result, the most varied modifications of established genres have appeared and in a number of instances, something known as "free" prose, which is characteristic not only of Soviet literature and which in the German Democratic Republic, for example, is usually called simply "the genre of prose".

The question of literature's stylistic diversity deserves to be examined in greatest detail.

For many years attempts have been made to define the main stylistic trends of Soviet literature. Back in 1934, Alexander Fadeyev wrote about there being three major stylistic trends in literature. Firstly, the depiction of life in forms of life itself, that is, by remaining faithful to all the real aspects of life and by drawing typical characters in typical circumstances. Secondly, the representation of reality in conventionalised forms. And thirdly,

synthetic monumental realism resembling Goethe's *Faust*. Researchers today unanimously agree over the first of these trends but define the rest differently, referring to the development of a lyrical romantic stylistic trend, the style of metaphorical imagery, and books with a predominantly philosophical and symbolic style. The question of similar stylistic trends being present in all the different national literatures of the Soviet Union has been discussed and well-substantiated attempts have been made to chart a kind of typological map of the literature of developed socialism. But all the same we by no means fully understand the real complexities of stylistic trends and frequently use old clichés to define them.

We must also bear in mind the diversity of the idea content of Soviet literature.

What does the thesis of the ideological unity of Soviet literature really mean? In my opinion, simply that an overwhelming majority of Soviet writers share the ideals of the Communist Party and the goals of the socialist system, wish it well and reject the alternative capitalist way of social development for themselves and their people.

It goes without saying that from an ideological viewpoint our literature is less "diversified" than the literatures of capitalist countries. Works propagandising militarism, nationalism, cruelty and violence are excluded from its idea content. You will never come across pornography in writing. Neither will you find religious propaganda in print. It does not tolerate a deliberately tendentious and slanderous reflection of the history of Soviet society and its contemporary reality. Is this a restriction on man's creative liberty? Yes, it certainly is for one wishing to follow these trends. Otherwise the writing of Soviet authors is not regulated by society either in respect to its form or the ideas it expresses. This is all the more true, since the ideological content of literature and art does not take the form of a direct proclamation of the artist's political position. The work's ideological message is seen in all the aspects of its content and form and, in the final count, is perceived by taking into consideration such factors as the artist's personal vision of the world and approach to the representation of reality, the inspiration of his writing and the aesthetic ideal which he affirms. Is it then possible to say that total

concord exists between writers in this sphere and that literature therefore cannot be called diverse as far as its ideological content is concerned?

A writer's attitude to reality is something extremely difficult to define in concrete words but it is, indeed, a very important component of creative writing. In this respect contemporary Soviet novelists and poets are certainly not identical. These world attitudes are represented by a wide range of works, with books of a romantic optimistic character (such as A. Avdeyenko's *I Love)* at one end of the scale and works of a stern, at times even gloomy character (such as Yuri Kazakov's *You Were Crying Bitterly in Your Sleep),* on the other.

The main stream in literature is bordered by works of a varied social impact. For all the undoubted artistic merits of many of them, their social analysis is less profound and they concentrate more on particular details and concrete facts of everyday life, and the author to a greater extent identifies himself with his hero. Quoting Pushkin's poem *The Monument:* "...My lyre was tuned to loving kindness", one could say that many writers limit their task to tuning their lyre to "loving kindness" and affirming universal spiritual and moral values. However, is this not an essential part of the social mission accomplished by the belles-lettres?

I still have to say a few words about how socialist realism is interpreted today.

What is realism in general? In the most general terms, it is not a direction or a trend but a type of artistic creation expressing the profound change in aesthetic consciousness from mythological and religious notions to a veracious, true-to-life interpretation of world events.

Realism has become firmly established in world art over several centuries, taking various concrete historical forms. There was the realism of the Renaissance, brilliantly embodied in the works of Shakespeare. Then there was the realism of the Enlightenment, whose specific features were determined by its high rationalism. Great accomplishments were made in literature and art with the advent in the 19th century of "critical" or, to be more precise, social-analytical realism. At its base was historical materialism, which spontaneously began to penetrate into people's minds and

artistic consciousness, and also the discovered dialectics of interaction between characters and circumstances.

The epoch of the country's socialist transformation called into being an unprecedented type of epic realism, which was enhanced by vast artistic experience and the ideals of communism and which, at its zenith, was called "socialist realism". In so far as the epic became the creative reference-point of the new art, it became possible to define the boundaries of socialist realism with criteria pertaining not only to its idea content and subject matter but also to its form (and, in particular, to its style).

The change in the aesthetic state of the world, which came about as the new social formation went from one stage of its development to the next, had a strong impact on the sphere of culture. The centripetal tendency towards the epic gave way to a tendency towards increasing the diversity of literature in its typology, themes, genres, style and idea content. Epic realism, while still one of the mainstays of socialist art, nevertheless, ceased to be regarded as its synonym. As relations between the ideal and reality, between characters and circumstances became more complex, an objective need was felt to make wide use of the forms of traditional social-analytical realism. These two interacting typological tendencies determine the original picture of the present-day process in literature and art.

The inner reorientation in idea content and aesthetics that had occurred in literature and art has severely tested the theory of socialist realism: two alternatives were given to it, either, to adhere to the former definition of socialist realism (as a synonym of epic realism) and ignore the changes taking place, or to reassess the traditional concept with due regard for the new conditions and tasks of literature and art.

For a long time our literary critics and historians tried to remain faithful to the initial theoretical formulas, deriving the idea content and aesthetic principles of socialist realism only from the experience of the Soviet literary classics. However, as time went by, this more and more obviously caused theoretical thought to lose touch with real artistic practice and get caught in a vicious circle of speculative definitions.

In the 70s more efforts were made to bring the theory of socialist realism into accord with the entire experience of Soviet

culture over the past sixty years, bearing in mind also the experience of other socialist countries. Scholars of different generations participated in the discussions touching upon various aspects of socialist realism and a wealth of material was written on the subject.

Soviet critic Dmitry Markov's conception of socialist realism as an open aesthetic system has won international acclaim and increasing popularity.

"Anything in the boundaries of the broad platform of artistic veracity," writes Markov, "is within the aesthetic possibilities of socialist realism. No one single genre, no one form of generalised imagery can be said to be synonymous to the concept of the new creative method, which is based on the socialist conception of the world and man." And further on he says, "It is a broad and, at the same time, well-defined aesthetic platform. Without converging with the aesthetic conceptions that violate veracity, it is open to the true accomplishments in the art of the past as well as to new creative discoveries. In this sense, socialist realism coincides with the general properties (laws) of all veracious art, represents its new stage and expresses the historical prospects of its development."[25]

It is understandable why this new definition won wide acclaim among many scholars. It takes account of the real typological diversity of literature and art in the socialist countries, and rejects the dogmatic prescriptions designating the use of specific forms in the new art. The criteria of socialist realism proposed by Markov are sufficiently well-defined so as not to make the definition vague and uncertain, and at the same time, flexible enough to cover new phenomena in art and ensure fruitful interaction of theory and practice.

At present, socialist realism is a main and basic trend of Soviet literature, which does not exhaust it totally, and "a historically open aesthetic system"; it is contemporary realism, unusually rich in form and enhanced by communist ideals. Mikhail Sholokhov, whose works are inseparable from the progressive development of 20th-century literature, has described the specific features of this realism very succinctly. In his speech at a writers' congress, he said: "People abroad often ask us, some with malicious intent, others with genuine interest, to bring them in

the know, so to speak, to give them an idea of what socialist realism is really all about. I wouldn't dream of doing our theoreticians' job for them, and, anyway, like most people of my profession, I am not very good at scientific formulas, but to such questions I usually reply that socialist realism is the art of the truth of life, the truth seen from the viewpoint of Lenin's Party principle. Or, to put it simpler, to my mind, art which actively helps people in building a new world is, in fact, the art of socialist realism."[26]

NOTES

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Chapter Five
A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

We feel a natural curiosity as we look at the 80s, which have just begun, and at the last decade of this century ahead of them. What does the future history of Soviet literature hold for us and our children? What new heights will our promising young writers reach? What unknown names will be transferred from school reports to book covers and become highlighted in this country and abroad? What discoveries in art will leave an impression on the face of the literature of the 80s and 90s and the turn of the 21st century?

There is an opaque veil shrouding literature's tomorrow. Much of what has to do with concrete phenomena in art is basically unpredictable, for otherwise literature would not be a literature moved by talents exceeding all possible rules and regulations. However, be that as it may, one can still catch glimpses of the immediate future through this veil. Literary trends and tendencies of today are now approaching it and beginning to filter through it.

This is certainly a hard theme to deal with but I shall still attempt a somewhat unusual excursion through future books.

The only reservation I should like to make is that one cannot make forecasts without first thinking of the principles on which they should be based and looking for possible mainstays.

1. THREE TYPES OF FORECASTS

So far I have come across three types of forecasts in the sphere of literature, which I shall refer to as forecasts of an *essay*, *historical* and *sociological* type.

The forecast of an essay type is the most characteristic of writers and critics. Basically, it refers to someone making certain conjectures in writing or speaking without much concern for conclusive argumentation. Even a whole conception is sometimes offered but it again relies heavily on what *seems to be true* to its author. More often than not, such forecasts look far ahead, say, one or two hundred years from now.

A typical example of this type of forecast is provided by Vladimir Turbin's book *Comrade Time and Comrade Art* (1961). "I want to make a forecast of the development of the arts," he declares, "to calculate, if approximately, the trajectory which creative thought, always accompanying the human race, will be following in its orbit."

Here we have not just a forecast but a direct "command to the armies of the arts". To sum up, here is what Turbin wrote:

"We must radically change fiction. Dismantle it. We can't go on listening excitedly to the speeches of literary heroes and watching their feats for ever! It would be more sensible to have a look at what divine inspiration gives poets the power to create them.

"Time! For a period of forty centuries art has predicted its relativity, and physics has confirmed it. Let us perfect ourselves. Competing with physics, let us show the very movement of man's thought as it perceives the relativity of time...

"Space! For centuries painting has demonstrated the way in which three dimensions may be turned into two. It freely manipulated space. But haven't we had enough of pretty coloured photographs? Isn't it time for the artist's brush to tell people about the secrets of the dialectics of space which he has come to understand?..

"Each one, individually, must gain a complete understanding of time, space and movement. All together we must work towards the union of art with science, physics and mathematics. Towards the alliance of forms and formulas. Towards perfection in studying the train of human thought, its methods and its quests..."[1]

Well, it is indeed very important to think about the effects the scientific and technological revolution will have on the arts. But why do the arts in this century have to go to such suicidal extremes and "dismantle" themselves, in fact, put their specific forms

at the mercy of formulas? This is something you are not meant to ask in this type of forecast. After all, we already know that it is based on what *seems* to the author to be true.

Throughout his book the critic clearly expressed his antipathy for traditional psychological analysis, without which realism is unthinkable. In the same spirit as certain Soviet theoreticians of the 20s, he cast aspersions on this psychological analysis in every way possible and assured his readers of its obsolescence and doom. "I am convinced," he wrote, "that before long the theories, which were once extremely useful, stipulating the psychological approach as an essential part of art, will be considered prejudices." And in any case, to the critic's mind, "our time needs generalisations. It is waiting for a synthesis".[2]

Let's note "before long" and "our time". As we can see, Turbin does not mean some time in the distant future when our descendants will be contemplating the stripped framework of artistic constructions but what is going on right here and now, in the present. And in so far as two decades have already passed since Turbin's book came out, we are entitled to ask if at least one of his forecasts, for instance, that about the obsolescence of psychological analysis, has been justified.

In fact, quite the opposite is true. The irony of it is that the book appeared right at the beginning of the new major stage in the development of literature and art when the country entered the period of mature socialism. And for various reasons at the stage in question synthesising epic consciousness became somewhat weaker and was compensated by the intensive development of analytical and lyrical thought. This stage was characterised by its more profound psychological analysis and use of the most diverse means of penetrating into the microcosm of the human personality.

Of course, not all the forecasts of an essay type are so far from the truth. A certain number subsequently prove quite realistic. But it is all rather like a game of roulette in which you cannot tell how certain lucky people manage to guess the right number.

The second method I have come across is historical. Here we enter the domain of scientific prognosis. The scientist examines the tendencies of development of one or another form of art over a considerable length of time and tries to establish how these ten-

dencies will proceed to develop in the future. A striking example of this type of forecast is seen in the work of Academician Dmitri Likhachev, and particularly in his articles *The Future of Literature as an Object of Study*[3] and *Progressive Developments Over the History of Russian Literature.*

Noting beforehand that there are in fact many more of such progressive trends in the history of Russian literature and that they are all closely linked together, Likhachev lists the following eight points:

1. *The gradual reduction of straightforward conventional forms.* During the thousand-year-old history of Russian literature symbols and esoteric allegories gradually disappear, the role of various kinds of prescribed rules and canons diminishes and literature in all respects merges, as it were, with reality, both, however, retaining their essential "different potentials".

2. *Decrease of the spontaneous element.* The proportions of the organised and spontaneous, rational and irrational elements change. Instead of being outwardly organised and dependent on canons, literature becomes inwardly more organised, which indicates a higher level of development. Literature creates its own theory and gives birth to its satellite, criticism.

3. *The increase in the role of the creative personality.* The role of the artist's personality creating works of literature, grows with every new century. And one cannot say that it has reached its peak because the movement of literature is always opening up new vistas in its way.

4. *An increase in the "freedom of choice".* As the number of genres, styles and forms increases so does the freedom of literature in general. Various types of normative rules and regulations are overcome. Freedom, however, is still dialectically bound to necessity, and the socially determined nature of literature becomes more complex and indirect. But does not vanish.

5. *Growing democratism.* The barriers of estate and literary etiquette are broken down and literature continually selects new strata of society as the object of its depiction and aspires towards vast democratism.

6. *The increased role of humanism.* This increase comes about in leaps and bounds, as it were, and not smoothly and steadily. The value of one or another class, social stratum and then indi-

vidual personality is discovered with this increase in the humanist content of literature.

7. *Vaster world experience.* Russian literature had access to the increasingly diverse values of the literatures of its neighbouring countries and then to world literature as a whole. This process did not in any way diminish its original national features but, on the contrary, made them acquire new facets and allowed them to appear in a new form at each historical stage.

8. *The reader's appreciation of literary works becomes broader and deeper.* There was a time when the form of some old works of literature was altered and adapted to suit new generations of readers, though their inner content remained unchanged. Later, an aspiration made itself felt for an immutable "eternal" form, guarded by its author's name, but with a changeable new content, which could be interpreted differently depending on the times.

"One must always see in his mind's eye the thousand-year-old history of Russian literature," writes Dmitry Likhachev in conclusion. "It is important for an understanding of contemporary life and for looking into the future. Tomorrow is a continuation not only of today but also of yesterday and the days of the distant past. You can only really appreciate the present in its historical context. Our contemporary literature deserves to be evaluated in the context of the world historical development of literature and not simply in the narrow confines of the 20th century."[4]

I hope that you can tell even from such a short précis of Academician Likhachev's article that it deals with processes and phenomena of exceptional importance for an understanding of the prospects of literature's development. This historical method or, in other words, method of extrapolating the main lines of literary progress of the past into the future is an indispensable instrument of scientific prognosis.

But what about the sociological method? I, unfortunately, do not have a particular article or book which would enable me to demonstrate its main features in a similarly graphic manner, so I shall have to give some examples of long standing.

"Our time ... by virtue of its general state is not favourable to art,"[5] said Hegel and concluded that art was losing its social necessity and was bound, sooner or later, to leave the historical

scene. This is a sociological forecast in so far as Hegel's conclusion issued directly from his understanding of the dialectics of the interaction between art and society.

While accepting Hegel's thesis on the tight bonds between the state of society and art, other 19th-century thinkers did not agree with the great German philosopher on one point. Namely, they did not consider the existing conditions to be the final form of social life. And this immediately threw new light on the question of the future of the arts.

Richard Wagner, as we recall, predicted that art would manage to rise from its state of civilised barbarism to a height worthy of it on the shoulders of a great social movement. Russian writer Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin expressed his confidence in the fact that "the capacity for change of social forms ... predicts a vast future for human creativity".[6] According to literary critic Nikolai Dobrolyubov, an epopee of popular life would appear only when the self-awareness of the people rose to a new level and was able "to express itself completely in a poetic language".[7]

Engels' forecasts, which we have already cited, have to do with the prospects of the social liberation movement ("A complete fusion of profound ideas and historical content ... with the Shakespearean vitality and wealth of action will probably only be attained in the future...") as do Lenin's ("It will be a free literature, because the idea of socialism and sympathy with the working people, and not greed or careerism, will bring ever new forces to its ranks...").

Having undertaken to make a forecast of the future, I shall have to resort to a well-known deductive formula of social prognosis: in the given case this formula means suggesting or even affirming that *if such and such changes take place in society, literature will eventually react to them in such and such a way.*

Such a formula is incompatible with the views of art's independence of reality and the autonomy of the creative process. A Marxist theoretician proceeds from the conviction that the development of art is based on objective social and historical factors and that there are definite laws governing art's interaction with reality and that these laws are ultimately cognisable. The core of the matter is whether we know these laws and whether we are capable, at our present level of knowledge, of taking

into account the countless social factors, which influence art in one way or another and define its future.

I would like my readers to recall what was said about the laws of art's interaction with reality in the first chapter of this book. In particular, its conclusion that the major link between social development and that in literature and art is formed by the mobile and historically changeable relations between man and the world. If we bear in mind this cardinal feature of the impact reality has on art (without taking into consideration other, less important factors and the reciprocal influence of art on reality), we shall see the following historical and logical sequence of processes:

1. The interaction of man and his environment, the individual and society, and the character and circumstances changes in one direction or another.

2. The sphere of social attitudes changes and man's perception of the world acquires new features.

3. The arts undergo a major restructuring: the typology of art and its genre pattern are changed; artists begin to feed on other than before traditions of the past, and theory re-examines its notions of the goals of art.

This process is complex enough even in such a brief outline, and, of course, much more so in real life. And one realises how naive it is to try and directly project various phenomena on art, such as the effects of the scientific and technological revolution. It is one thing to convey certain aspects of the scientific and technological revolution in a fictional work through its plot, the daily concerns or even characters of the heroes, and quite another to expect it to completely alter the inner nature of art and the media of artistically reflecting the world of reality. The scientific and technological revolution can have an impact on literature only in so far as it affects man's interaction with the world and opens up new vistas for creative social activity, which makes itself felt in the mobile social sentiments.

As Lenin wrote: "The social structure of society and of state power is characterised by changes, and unless these changes are understood not a single step can be taken in any sphere of social activity. The understanding of these changes determines the prospects for the future, by which we mean, of course, not idle

guessing about things unknown, but the basic trends of economic and political development—those trends, the resultant of which determines the immediate future of the country, those trends which determine the tasks, direction and character of the activity of every intelligent public man."[8]

For anyone wishing to try and make a social forecast, here is a good, practical piece of advice: don't indulge in "idle guessing about things unknown" but look at the major trends of social development instead, and find their "resultant" in one sphere or another. This, in fact, is real task of any researcher.

2. SOVIET LITERATURE IN THE 80s AND 90s.

We have decided where we are going to proceed from and worked out the possible trends our forecasts will follow. So now let's leave the safe abode of the past and present behind and set off on a hazardous journey through unknown terrains of the future. The fascination and reality of such a journey were years ago emphatically expressed by Shakespeare in his tragedy *King Henry IV. Second Part:*

> *There is a history in all men's lives,*
> *Figuring the nature of the times deceas'd;*
> *The which observ'd, a man may prophesy,*
> *With a near aim, of the main chance of things*
> *As yet not come to life, which in their seeds,*
> *And weak beginnings, lie intreasured.*
> *Such things become the hatch and brood of time...*

The first condition we must take into account in our forecast of the not so distant future is the situation in the world. I shall proceed from the fact that during the last two decades of the 20th century we expect peace, uneasy, full of alarms and dangers but, nevertheless, peace maintained by the reason and will of thousands of millions of people all over the world. The rivalry of the two social systems will continue, acquiring new forms and accents, in economy, politics and culture. I am convinced that in the course of this competition mankind will get a clearer idea of

the fact that major world problems can only be solved by way of the socialist transformation of society.

The second indispensable condition is the situation in this country, and the course of communist construction. Soviet science does not forecast when exactly the comprehensive development of the socialist system will lead to a qualitative leap—to the country's entry into the second, higher phase of the new social formation. This would be "idle guessing about things unknown". However, it is almost certain that this will take place in more than twenty years from now. The first half of the 20th century saw the revolutionary transition from one formation to the next and the establishment of socialism in our country. The second half of the century marks a time of mature socialism, a time in which the new social system developed and improved on its own basis.

With due regard for these two conditions, what are the prospects of the development of the belles-lettres ?

A revolution in aesthetics radically changing the media of artistically reflecting reality is unlikely. The literature of the 80s and 90s will develop mainly along the same lines as in the 60s and 70s.

This is my main conclusion from all the previous ideas I have put forward. It may perhaps seem too timid or self-evident but, to make up for that, it is based on theoretically sound sociological and aesthetic material, supported with proof and evidence, and not on what *seems* to be true to its author.

The long-term contemporary stage of literary development, which began in the 60s, will continue during the next two decades. This stage is connected with the epoch of mature socialism and a definite aesthetic state of the world. However, it certainly does not follow that literature will remain the same in every way. Of course, its themes and genres will be somewhat altered and some of its present artistic trends will recede as others come to the fore. Without confining oneself to an appraisal of the situation as a whole, it is important for one to understand the nature of the social processes which will have an impact on the development of literature, and to determine at least a few of the directions it will be following.

I'll start with an easier question, namely, the immediate future

of the war literature, which has been developing intensively and fruitfully in recent years.

For the time being the theme is not historical, strictly speaking, because the war was and still is written about by contemporaries who either witnessed the events or actually took part in them, and who regard the war years as the time when they matured fully as citizens and started out or reached their peak in literature. But, alas, time and tide wait for no man and now even the soldiers of the last war year call up, who were born in 1926 and 1927, have celebrated their fifty-fifth birthday. That means, by the end of the 80s they will all be of a retiring age. And one cannot help wondering as to how the change of generations of writers will affect the way the war theme is handled.

In his speech at the Sixth Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers, poet Konstantin Vanshenkin said: "We have our own desperately keen readers and we shall keep on writing about the war and our young days and our killed friends for as long as we live. That I am sure of, but what then? Is anyone going to write about the war after us and, if so, how?"[9] Another speaker, G. Tsitsishvili, noted that there were no young people participating in the discussion on the war theme. And he again spoke of the same issue: "Over thirty years' experience has most clearly shown that truthful fiction about the war can only be written by people who saw the war with their own eyes or personally took part in its events. However, this is an indisputable fact only now, while the people who survived the war are still alive. For they can easily tell a fake from something that's genuine and true. But what about when all these eye-witnesses have passed on? Who knows, perhaps those who have not seen the war will also succeed in writing about it. . ."[10]

Indeed, writers who have not seen the war are already trying to write about it today. Take, for example, Chigrinov's novel *The Quail's Cry,* Rasputin's novella *Live and Remember,* Makarov's *The Man with the Accordeon* and Kanoat's poem *Voices of Stalingrad,* which are all graphic works, full of deep dramatic tension. So don't they disprove the theory that truthful works about the war can only be written by people with a firsthand knowledge of it?

Not really. Firstly, the above-mentioned writers did, in fact,

catch a glimpse of the war, no matter how brief it was. And they also lived in the post-war period and grew up among people for whom the recent war had been the most memorable time of their lives. Secondly, the angle from which these young writers approached the war theme was such that their lack of firsthand experience could be compensated by their own impressions of life and creative imagination. For instance, Valentin Rasputin devotes only a few pages to his hero's front-line experiences but they are essential for him to explain Guskov's fatal decision to desert and head home after being wounded again. And we have to admit that this description lacks the psychological depth and authenticity of detail of some of Rasputin's former works and, what's more, features found in many other parts of the same novella.

To my mind, what we have here is the first sign of the theme of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 turning from an autobiographical into a historical one, which is depicted without the author's firsthand experience. In the 80s this historical approach to the war theme will become more widespread and by the 90s it will be predominant.

How will this affect artistic depiction?

Going by familiar analogies (such as the depictions of the revolution and the Civil War in the 20s and 70s), fifty years will make a considerable difference in the way writers re-create historical events.

Firstly, there will not be the wealth of detail resulting from the flow of spontaneous first impressions, and their selection will be to a greater extent determined by the main idea of the work.

Secondly, only problems of lasting significance will be chosen.

And, thirdly, the correlation between the time depicted and the present in which historical events are appraised, will be slanted in favour of the latter.

These and certain other changes will evidently appear in the depiction of the war theme as successive post-war generations of writers turn to this subject. Correspondingly, its reading public will change, too. These future works about the Great Patriotic War will be read by people for whom it will be just as much a legendary time as, say, the age of the revolution is today for most Soviet readers by far.

The question of the young generation of writers is closely linked with another question, which has been asked by both writers and readers for a long time now, namely whether we will live to see the publication of an epic work about the Great Patriotic War of the same stature and significance as Lev Tolstoy's *War and Peace.*

People were speaking confidently about the appearance of such a novel even before the war was over. It was in those days Ilya Ehrenburg said that the Tolstoy-to-be was not yet writing because he was still at the war. And four decades on, people are still hoping that such a Tolstoy will appear. "Unfortunately," wrote the late writer Boris Polevoi, "our contemporary literature does not yet have a Lev Tolstoy who with his inborn wisdom and depth could perceive and interpret the past war as a whole. Our future Tolstoy is perhaps only just a child now going to kindergarten. . ."[11]

Literary critic I. Kozlov, who specialises on war literature, considers this future epic is bound to appear one day. "It seems to me," he wrote in an article, "that the war epic we have been talking and arguing about for a long time, and referring to it as the Soviet *War and Peace* or *The Book about the War,* will contain a fair share of journalism."[12]

However, some people thought quite the opposite. ". . .What do I think about a new Soviet novel *War and Peace?* Will there be one?" Konstantin Simonov repeated his readers' question and then replied emphatically, "No, there won't. *War and Peace* is unique and there will never be another book like it."[13] "More likely than not," wrote writer G. Berezko about the same matter, "the natural desire to read the whole truth about the greatest feat of Soviet man will be satisfied by our literature as a whole and not just by one book."[14]

What can I add to this? Forecasting the appearance or non-appearance of separate works is a futile business but there do exist certain objective factors here enabling one to make an exception to the rule.

Among the twenty million who lost their lives in the war defending our country, there were hundreds of writers and thousands of writers-to-be. Enemy bullets and shell-splinters decided the fate of a great many books describing this great epic event

of the 20th century. It is quite possible that among these unwritten books there would have been more significant and talented ones than those we know and admire today. But this, unfortunately, will never be known. So we have to proceed from facts in the past and present.

In order to depict the battles of the Patriotic War of 1812 in a truthful and profound manner it was enough for Tolstoy to take part in the Crimean War nearly half a century later, for in this time span little had changed in the nature of war. In our century, however, everything changes at a much swifter rate and only someone with firsthand knowledge is capable of conveying the unique atmosphere of the time and drawing a large-scale realistic panorama of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. However, again this can only mean authors living and writing today whom we all know well.

Evidently, what matters most here, is the difference between these two Patriotic wars in our history, and between the social and historical conditions in which they took place. Unlike its forerunner, the Patriotic War of 1941-1945 gave birth to an epic art while its great battles were still being fought. The second wave of epic works on the war theme appeared in the 60s and especially the 70s. Of course, quantity can never replace quality in art but one has sufficient reasons to feel proud of the honest and interesting war literature which is being published today.

During the 80s we shall be reading books which are now being devised or already written by writers of the war generation. There will be many versions of what we already know and books of far-reaching resonance and profound tragic overtones, emerging from all that has been thought out and re-experienced over the past decade. Various noticeable gaps in our war prose are most likely to be filled in. One can expect, for instance, to see a significant novel about the battles in the environs of Moscow in 1941, a time when all our forces were strained to the utmost, a time of a truly epic situation when the subsequent fate of the people, the country and all mankind depended on the efforts of each individual. However, we have every reason to suppose that *The Book About the War* was and still is the brilliant *Book About a Soldier (Vassili Tyorkin)* written by Alexander Tvardovsky in 1941-1945. And future generations—here I agree entirely with

Georgi Berezko—will get a truthful picture of the war not from just one epic novel, but from all the works written shortly after the events and many years later, commemorating the twentieth, thirtieth and soon the fortieth anniversary of the victory over fascism.

Now I shall look at the possible thematic developments in the literature about village life. By this I, of course, mean something more than simply the themes of works. The poetry and prose about village life contain a powerful social and moral message, and a rich and complex world of human emotions. These works form a significant and original part of contemporary Soviet literature as a whole.

It is well known that there exist certain laws governing the appearance of gifted people. In the regular life of peacetime they appear one at a time and join the literary scene in a relatively inobtrusive manner. Major social cataclysms give birth to whole pleiades of talented people and arrange them in clearly-defined generations. Such was the case during the Great October Socialist Revolution and during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. It is worth noting that Mikhail Kulchitsky, who was killed at the front, felt and expressed this in one of his poems of 1939:

The war year knocks
On my country's door. It comes in.
What sorrows, what losses
Has the monster in store for us?
What people will arise
From defeat and victory?
What poet will come
As Revolution's second love?

In the history of Soviet society there has been one other unique kind of cataclysm, which has lasted several decades: the extremely rapid (from the historical point of view) transformation of a rural country into a predominantly urban industrial one. This situation is quite unique. Never before have the processes of migration played such an important role in the country's life. Never before have tens of millions of country dwellers simultaneously left home and moved to towns, and, most likely, nothing

similar will ever happen again. And this unique social and historical shift has caused an atmosphere of great emotional tension in which a great many talented people have been born and shaped.

How will literature about village life develop in the future in view of this migration and other social processes?

I shall first note that we are dealing here with processes of a gradual and lasting nature which cannot be expected to have a sudden impact on the arts. Secondly, we must also remember the fairly significant differences in the correlation of towns and villages, in the character of the demographical problems, say, in Central Russia, Estonia, Moldavia, Uzbekistan and the other national republics. And these differences, summed up with distinctions of a purely artistic nature, cannot but leave their imprint on the way in which the theme of village life is treated.

Literature about village life will exist as long as people are sowing wheat and keeping all the age-old traditions which have been renewed and transformed by the socialist system. And we have every reason to suppose that the 80s and 90s will bring no sharp change in literature's approach to the depiction of village life. The task of preserving everything of value in country life will prevail in the future just as it does today. Exceptionally talented people with a profound love of the earth and an acute sense of the irrevocability of certain facets of popular life will join the literary scene. The ecological aspect of the theme Man and Earth, which is already being studied, will be more comprehensively and diversely developed.

One should like to hope that time and experience will make the literature about village life maturer and more discriminating in an ideological and sociological sense. Let us hope that it will more effectively avoid the trap of giving an idyllic depiction of the past taken out of its class context, and of speculatively contrasting town and village life. In the near future one would also like to see more vivid and true-to-life portrayals of the modern village and all its new cares and concerns, and acute social and moral collisions. This is obviously a social demand made on our highly talented literature on this theme by time itself, and not a forecast.

But as far as forecasts go, I believe that the mass migration

of villagers to towns is coming to an end. The proportion of urban and rural residents is beginning to stabilise at a new level which is most favourable for developed socialism. What's more, over the next decades the vast number of first-generation townspeople will steadily decrease and, correspondingly, the proportion of urban residents born and bred in towns, will increase and gain predominance. Is this of significance to literature? Yes, it evidently is. This long-lasting, steady social process is beginning to diffuse the one time expanding "marginal" milieu half-way between villages and towns, which became the main source of talented writers and formed the largest reading public of literature about village life. And although, I repeat, this literature is sure to thrive for a long time, it can well happen that the 60s and 70s, when it dominated all other trends, will remain the peak of its development, never to be repeated.

The prospects of the industrial theme are equally important. Critics have been delighted to see that it has regained its urgency and social ring, especially in drama. However, in comparison with the works of the period of the first five-year plans and, what's more, with the scale of the people's work achievements, the results of today's literature seem somewhat disappointing and cause one to expect much more. But to what extent are these expectations actually justified?

Soviet writers are continuing the traditions started by their predecessors half a century ago. Many go on special trips to Siberia's major construction sites, industrial plants and huge hydroelectric power stations, for each visit enables them to get a better idea of the scale of the work going on in the country. Such trips make writers more exacting and strict with regard to the results of their own work. However, the links between these visits and their results in the form of books are now much more complex, as are, generally speaking, the links between technology and people, between industrial and social processes.

Nowadays there cannot possibly be such a concentration of writers' talents on this theme as there was, say, in the late 20s and early 30s. This is so, firstly, because Soviet society, and its literature, are simultaneously solving a great many serious tasks at once. And, secondly, because an analytical approach to the world of labour presupposes the writer's meticulous knowledge as to his

heroes' occupation, of people's relations in industry and of a great many inner conflicts which are not apparent to outsiders. And this can only be achieved satisfactorily by writers with first-hand experience of work at factories, plants, oil-industry works, and construction sites.

There is good cause to believe not only that writers have got over their "phobia" of the industrial theme but that the revived interest of both writers and readers in this subject will not be short-lived. Nowadays it dominates our literature's social analysis and study of the dialectics of Soviet society's development in the period of mature socialism. The industrial theme gives the writer a real chance to reveal, interpret, and discuss the problems on whose solution the advance of our society depends and with which, in the final count, the future prospects of the historical competition of socialism and capitalism are linked.

During the period from the 50s to the 70s there was a constant tendency towards broader idea content and increased artistic diversity of Soviet literature, and I am certain this tendency will continue in the 80s and 90s.

Diversity is a broad concept. Instead of merely stating that it will be further increased in the future, one should produce some theoretically sound suppositions on the most probable future trends in the literary process. Here, however, one enters a sphere furthest away from the phenomena of a socio-historical nature and least receptive to sociological study. And so one has to be particularly careful when forecasting the development of one or another literary trend.

Let us see what literary historians and writers have to say on the matter. Soviet critic Yu. Andreyev notes "the development and improvement of literature's analytical functions enlarging our knowledge of the world of human relations". In concrete term this is "primarily a more profound psychological analysis. It becomes more and more diverse without necessarily following any one model... Psychologism is one of the decisive directions of contemporary literature".[15]

These are certainly serious arguments based on literature's practical experience and their validity may be tested by sociological and aesthetic data. However, Yu. Andreyev also makes statements which are clearly of an "essay type". The critic is, for instance,

of the opinion that the "evaluative-narrative aspect" (in literature) is beginning to dominate more and more obviously over the purely narrative, informational one... Literature is getting closer and closer to the principle which mathematicians call "necessary and sufficient".[16] Yuri Bondarev wrote on this subject in even more definite terms: "To my mind, the time has come in literature to join the two dictatorships—of the image and the intellect. Purely 'descriptive' literature is, in my opinion, gradually losing its significance."[17]

To my mind, Russian critic Vissarion Belinsky came nearest to the truth in this matter. When comparing the works of Ivan Goncharov and Alexander Herzen, he drew the conclusion that both purely "descriptive" literature (Goncharov) and "evaluative" intellectual literature (Herzen) had a right to exist and that basically it was all a question of the writer's predisposition. And, in general, a feature of contemporary literature, as we have already noted, is seen in the more balanced development of different styles, genres and trends than previously. Thus, the forecasts suggesting that one particular trend will oust all others in the future can hardly be justified.

Philosopher Arseni Gulyga substantiates the theory that along with the traditional *typification, typologisation* has also been developed in 20th-century art: "A typological image in art is rather like silhouette. It is more schematised than a typified image but, to make up for it, is more capacious. What's more, its concreteness is not lost but simply less obvious." "A typified image is closer to a sensorial, concrete form, and a typological image, to a conceptual one. By using the method of typologisation, art draws nearer to science."[18] It was namely in this manner, according to A. Gulyga, that the writing of Bertolt Brecht developed.

Does the method of typologisation open up new vistas for art? Will it be developed in the next decades? There is a high degree of probability that it will, but with the specification that we are dealing here with *replenishing* the store of artistic devices and not with the ousting of one imagery system by another.

In my analysis of recent novels and novellas, I have cited a number of works in which the past and present were closely interwoven (Oles Honchar's *Cyclone,* Yuri Bondarev's *The Shore,* Yuri Trifonov's *The Old Man*). How should this phenomenon

be assessed? It would have been easy to say that what we have here are the novelists' experiments with the concept of time, a tendency which will soon gain pre-eminence. Let us, however, make note of the fact that all these novels are by writers of the older generation who are striving to express their keen awareness of the changing times. Such an aspiration may possibly not be shared by writers who know only one state of social life. So it could have been more correct to conclude that this form of narrative will undoubtedly be widely used and perfected in the future, but whether it will become a notable feature of the literature of the 80s and 90s depends on factors which at present cannot be clearly assessed or, at least, need to be studied more comprehensively.

Approximately the same arguments may be used in a discussion of some of the other relatively specific creative trends existing today.

3. THE FATES OF THE EPIC

What serious art critic today does not know that it is changes in life which give rise to radical changes in art? And who does not know that changes in man and his relations with the world are bound to have some impact on art? The breaking of a tradition, or starting-point of any art manifesto is new man and new, 20th-century reality.

What is 20th-century reality like from the point of view of aesthetics? Why does it encourage different and at times diametrically opposite artistic trends in such an indiscriminate manner?

19th-century art discerned a simple truth in the outer world, namely, that man was conditioned. Simply by being born he was automatically put in a definite social category and his inclinations were then moulded by his milieu and his actions dictated by circumstances. Classical realism, as we have already said, responded to this discovery by refuting bourgeois social relations and urgently searching for a firm foundation on which to put those norms of a truly human existence which may have been depreciated in reality but had still preserved their full value in the sphere of the aesthetic ideal.

Of course, these statements need to be greatly modified when

applied to different countries and different times, where and when the different tendencies manifested themselves but, on the whole, one can still say that Europe of the last two thirds of the 19th century was characterised by *one* humanitarian attitude to social reality, and so by *one* main type of aesthetic relations between art and reality.

But are we entitled to say the same about the past eight decades of the 20th century? Of course not. At the turn of the century there was already a sharp polarity in writers' attitudes to the world and their appraisal of reality. Long before the world found itself divided into two opposed social and economic systems, an indivisible line of an ideological and creative demarcation had already cut art in two.

The atmosphere which inspired Gorky to call the 20th century, that was only just beginning, "the century of spiritual renewal" was graphically embodied even in his early works. Take, for instance, Gorky's famous story about a steppe tribe chased by enemies into woods and marshes, and then led out of darkness by the legendary Danko. "...Arise, and let us go through the forest until we come out at the other end; after all, it must have an end—everything has an end!" ("Old Izergil") While bells were still ringing in the new century, Gorky wrote his famous *Song of the Stormy Petrel,* which proudly, boldly and freely soared between the lightnings, prophesying victory: "In the crashing of the thunder the wise Demon hears a murmur of exhaustion. And he knows the storm will die and the sun will be triumphant; sun will always be triumphant!"

The same stormy revolutionary epoch conjured quite different associations and images for Gorky's young contemporary, Franz Kafka. In one of his miniatures the latter wrote about how people in their everyday lives were like passengers on a train which had just crashed in a long tunnel. What's more, the tunnel was so long that they were plunged into pitch-darkness and could not see any light ahead of them. And the light behind was so faint that it kept vanishing from sight and it was quite impossible to tell whether the tunnel actually had a beginning and an end. At such moments, Kafka wrote, you did not ask what you should do or why.

It is hard to imagine anything more incompatible and con-

trastive than these two attitudes to one and the same historical moment. On the one hand, we have a sense of the imminent disaster which civilisation is to suffer, and of frightfully thick walls enclosing man on all sides, and, on the other, a sense of space, and the dazzling light of a way out which man had found after much wandering. One writer is lost in the world's icy wilderness, and every word he writes emanates from his despair and doubt. The other is totally confident in the advent of man's spiritual renewal, and this feeling of uplift inspires him to write in lofty rhythmical prose. Strictly speaking, everything we know about Gorky's and Kafka's "lines" in 20th-century art enables us to affirm that we are dealing here with an individual expression of two established types of artistic attitudes, two creative programmes producing entirely different creative results.

Kafka's "line" finds support in some facets, phenomena and characteristics of objective reality. The 20th century has shown how defenceless human nature is, how easily influenced by the world of social antagonisms, and how simple it is to turn man into a tiny cog in an anti-humanist social machine, a tiny part of the frenzied chauvinist masses. This century has revealed the terrible danger of uncontrolled scientific and technological progress to mankind's very existence and the unpredictable consequences of age-old creative quests. The past decades have shown that the process of alienation in its extreme forms can have drastic results. The individual's "natural" inner world has been completely replaced by an artificial mass-produced one with the help of propaganda, advertising and the latest popular crazes, and man has become merely a consumer, a link in the uninterrupted cycle of material production.

The vast zone of alienation, like a powerful magnetic anomaly, has caused diverse and profound shifts in art. The needle of art's compass, which has always had its "north" and "south" and, in spite of all the changing circumstances, has always pointed to creative man, suddenly lost its bearings and went berserk. The aesthetic ideal is fictitious if man is hopelessly lost in himself, and if the world is the same now as it always was and always will be. And it would have been ridiculous to draw a character in literature in as far as the alienated man of the 20th century is totally identical to all others like him. The plot is a vestige

of antiquity for it is an absurdity to speak of "the development of the action" when nothing ever happens. Questions of time and place are obviously the result of a misunderstanding because the only concepts which have any bearing on the existence of modern man are "here" and "now".

The complication here arises from the fact that decadent art, with the exception of all sorts of quackery and extreme forms of self-destruction, is still art but art of a particular kind whose emotional impact is associated with the destruction and repudiation of the traditional aesthetic ideal taking place in public. This art relies on its own non-realistic type of artistic generalisation: any tiny fragment of reality assumes universal significance, and any formal construction and artistic device can be used to expound general conceptions.

Decadent art is of a cognitive interest to a person of the socialist world as a symptom of an illness, as an obsession described from the viewpoint of the obsessed person. If we admit that in the last quarter of the 20th century man is facing the choice of either overcoming the dangers and difficulties threatening him and entering a new boundless phase of his development or leaving behind him a devastated planet, then we can say of decadent art that it is the art of the Apocalypse and of this second version of history.

One can understand something without necessarily accepting it. One can understand the inner logic of the "avant-garde" in art and its real social and historical base and still be convinced that this trend is wrong in theory and practice. The 20th-century reality has given us a vast amount of evidence for a different interpretation of what is actually happening in the world. And this reality is the strongest mainstay of the art of the "new man" of our epoch, the art of creative man.

It is said that people, no matter what historical moment they live in, see it as a critical moment of sharp change. The 20th century, however, has plenty of evidence to justify such an attitude. It is an indisputable fact that there has been a revolution in the sphere of material production, associated at first with electrification and then with automatisation, with the use of computers, of the cybernetic principles of control, of synthetic materials and with science's transformation into a direct productive force.

Whereas mankind's rapid technological and economic progress over the past few centuries has essentially been based on the discovery of the conversion of heat into mechanical motion, nowadays it is the fundamentally new nuclear sources of energy that are powerfully accelerating progress in economy and technology. What's more, roaring rocket engines in the 50s heralded the end of mankind's existence solely on this planet and the start of the space age.

Changes of such a kind in the material and technological base of man's life could not but affect the existing system of social relations. And the 20th century really has demonstrated other things apart from man's frailty and the vast number of dangers threatening him. Its great truth is, first and foremost, that it has set thousands of millions of people all over the world in motion, destroyed the foundations of the world of private-ownership and indeed become "the century of spiritual renewal" (Gorky). It has shown the great force of man's resistance to unfavourable circumstances, and the infinite creative possibilities revealed by the masses inspired by great ideals. Taken separately, each of the events of the 20th century may seem fortuitous and coincidental. All together, however, these events testify to the fact that through all the wars, revolutions, bold surges towards the future, tragic mistakes, successful and unsuccessful experiments, changing tides of the social movement, ways were being found to reconstruct society on new foundations. In the final count, these are quests for the forms of life which could ensure mankind's unhindered development and security in our age of atomic energy and space exploration.

As we glance back at the road covered by the literature of socialist realism since Gorky's *The Petty Bourgeois* in 1901, and try to see into the not so far-off future when this new literature's centenary wil be celebrated, one of the most pressing questions in our minds is about what is going to happen to the epic in the future.

The tendency to follow the traditions of Shakespeare, which was predicted by the classics of Marxism, became a reality when the thunder of the great social revolution was still only rumbling in the distance. The first to show the possibility of following Shakes-

peare was Gorky. After the revolution other artists, too, discovered a way of epically depicting the world caught up in a vortex of unprecedented events. Soviet literature of the 20s to the 40s was rich and diverse and the new reality was reflected from the most varied artistic angles. But for all that, its main contribution to 20th-century world literature is the epic of the revolution, the epic of the socialist reconstruction of society and, finally, the epic of the Great Patriotic War.

The epic of the 20th century differs from that of "the infancy of mankind" (Marx and Engels) in that it is actually aware of itself as an epic, comprehends the social character of man's destiny and reveals the real dialectics of the interaction between character and circumstances. In other words, it is an epic which has been enriched by vast historical experience. It is the harmonious and unique way in which the epic and socio-analytical elements are combined that makes Sholokhov's epic novels and the other outstanding works of the Soviet classics innovatory.

This line is also being continued in our mature socialist society at present. The same stormy heroic epoch when the new system was formed is usually at the base of works of an epic character. The past and present flow through these works like two rivers rushing into a single torrent. And which of the two currents proves stronger in many ways determines the type of novel and narrative. Whereas the Soviet classic is a "direct" epic, so to speak, created within an epic state of the world, the contemporary epic is retrospective, indirect and, to a larger extent, permeated with socio-psychological analysis. What's more, a considerable part of contemporary literature about the past does not have an expressed epic character.

Nevertheless, Soviet criticism is not giving up hope of seeing a new wave of epic works in the near future. Books are appearing whose titles (*Towards the Epic* and *In Anticipation of the Epic*) speak for themselves. There have been a series of discussions on the state of epic consciousness in contemporary literature, and contributions to these discussions have been made by writers and critics from all the socialist countries.

In a special issue of the journal *Voprosy Literatury* devoted to the novel, Polish critic W. Sadkowski noted: "The need for an epic as a means of helping man understand his surroundings,

is becoming more acute in view of the rather aggressive tendency to give all literature the nature of unanswered questions."[19]

Soviet critic Ye. Sidorov wrote in the same issue: "...Today a large-scale social and philosophical Soviet novel is being born of the experience of all our multi-national prose." "One may suppose that it will not give a panoramic picture in its outer exposition of events and episodes but that its panoramic view of modern man's soul and its hopes, concerns and delusions will be displayed with even greater scope and stereoscopic depth."[20]

"What comes hardest to the modern writer?" asks literary critic G. Belaya. "Getting a general view of the epoch. A conception of the world. And what Lev Tolstoy used to call a cohesion of thoughts." Nevertheless, "we are on the eve of the birth of new forms in the novel... Contemporary Soviet literature is already tensely anticipating its arrival"[21].

"Do I consider it possible for an epic novel to be based on the material of a historically 'tranquil' reality?" asks critic V. Sobolenko, closing the discussion. "So far the history of literature has given us no examples of this. But if a novel written in an epic form breaks its tradition and solves problems of everyday life with Tolstoy's convincingness and sweeping generalisations, I believe its supporters and opponents won't feel disappointed."[22]

What can one say about this?

Quite a few obstacles stand in the way of literature of an epic nature. Even after much deliberation, one still cannot come to clear-cut conclusion.

Much depends on the changing correlation in literature of the historical and contemporary themes.

During the 60s and 70s the literature about the epoch of the formation of socialism (including the years of the war) was not only just as significant and topical as the literature on contemporary themes but was, as a rule, in the highlight, defining the main content and trends of the literary process.

The reasons for such a situation are diverse. For one thing, there was a strong social demand for a literary interpretation of the experience of socialist construction. As to writers themselves, they were greatly attracted by the very acute social collisions testing man to his utmost. In addition, there are difficulties to do with reflecting the contemporary state of the world in a literary

form which have yet to be overcome. Let us not forget, however, the simple fact that over the last two decades the tone of literature has been set by the writers whose adolescence and youth, which are so important for a creative biography, coincided with the 20s, 30s and 40s.

The 35th anniversary of the victory over fascism, which was celebrated in 1980, means to all extents and purposes that even those writers who were born right after the war could no longer really be classified as young writers. And during the 80s not only is a young generation of writers going to emerge but more important changes for literature and art will take place. Literature is going to be written by people who do not know a way of life other than that of everyday work in peace-time. These writers have quite considerable advantages over their predecessors as far as education and professional training go but they have not had the occasion to pass through the great, edifying schools of the revolution, the socialist construction and the war.

Writers who started writing after the war have already entered the literary scene. In spite of all the inevitable contradictions and complexities of their artistic searchings, their works are on the whole continuing the traditions of Soviet classical literature and the writers of the older generation. Nevertheless, young writers obviously feel more inclined to write about the present and there is good reason to presume that this generation is going to write less books about the period from the 20s to the 40s and that their books on contemporary themes will gain predominance in literature.

The settled, measured everyday life of society gives rise to a socio-analytical and socio-psychological trend in art rather than an epic one. It is by no means "worse" than the epic trend (criticism, it seems, has stopped using this direct qualification) but has creative tasks of its own.

And there is one other circumstance, which Byelorussian writer Ales Adamovich spoke of in the following manner: "Perhaps it was a characteristic of the traditional epic to blunt the sharpness and pain of 'a given moment' by dissolving it in time. The idea behind it was that something which is finite for an individual is for a nation and for all of humanity a mere page in the book of historical immortality!" Now that a possible thermo-nuc-

lear war threatens to put all humanity in the position of an individual, one of the following must be true: either the traditional epic "is an anachronism because it is not substantiated morally and ethically or it must forsake something while acquiring something new".[23]

This question is of vital importance. I should also add that epics appeared at moments (or described such moments) when the tasks at hand were so specific and the alignment of opposing forces so apparent that the world seemed extremely simple. The world today seems fairly complex, for all the obvious competition between the two opposing systems; and its future prospects are also more complicated. Notwithstanding our historical optimism we are nevertheless acutely aware of the price already paid by mankind for the triumph of beauty and man's best aspirations towards the future. This optimism is inseparable from our constant feeling of anxiety as to the future of humanity.

In the alternative offered by Adamovich, the second possibility is certainly truer. The epic is not an anachronism but it really does have to change in some way and acquire new qualities. There is little point declaiming that the age is waiting to be synthesised as it is waiting for a lot of other things besides. It is true, however, that time and we, its bearers, cannot do without synthesis. Otherwise, literature will be uninspiring and dull, concerned only with the petty things of life and incapable of an epic vision. Soviet literature has never been like this and, of course, will not be like this at the end of the century either.

The year 2000, the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the second and third millenia, is only a conditional date but such is human nature that as the day draws closer, it inevitably captures the imagination and makes one ponder about what the future really will be like. And as literature is sensitive to such social sentiments, it is evidently going to keep searching for ways of interpreting the past 20th century from a broader viewpoint, trying to understand and present it as a difficult era in which a civilisation of a new kind was established on earth, and as an age of mankind's sweeping movement out of the past and into the future.

The world significance of the Soviet literary classics cannot be separated from the way in which the problems posed by man-

kind on the eve of a great historical turning-point were solved. Soviet literature showed that the education of a new man and formation of new social relations were processes of equal importance and were accomplished simultaneously during the revolutionary transformation of life. It revealed the beauty of ordinary people, who had joined the struggle for socialist ideals, and convincingly portrayed the self-realisation of the individual brought about by the revolution. It also reflected the new type of relations between man and the world, in which man was allotted the part of a revolutionary transformer; the unity of things general and things personal in accomplishing the most difficult history-making goals; the formation of a new socialist ethics, for which the support of religion was no longer necessary. Literally every sphere of creative writing made essential progress: the aesthetic ideal, and the humanism and democratism of art acquired new features, the cognitive possibilities for analysis and synthesis increased and the relations between the artist and the people, between art and reality changed immensely. The influence of socialist art on the development of world culture is ideologically and aesthetically, in cause and effect, analogous to the vast and irreversible impact the socialist revolution had on the course of world events.

The world significance of contemporary Soviet literature, that is, the literature of the second half of the 20th century, in the final analysis, also depends on the solution by Soviet society of the most complex universal tasks of communist construction. Very often these are the same tasks as the ones which were solved in the struggle for socialism. In other cases they are new problems which have cropped up recently.

The subsequent development of the socialist economy relies very heavily on the effectiveness of social production and a higher labour productivity. The way to achieve these tasks is by accelerating scientific and technological progress, improving the working of the economy and enlarging workers' participation in running industrial enterprises, collective and state farms. However, these means are themselves integral parts of our general goal which is to ensure the "well-being and free, *all-round* development for all the members of society".

The solution of Soviet society's main humanistic task depends on a series of issues, each of which is extremely important. We shall

have to do a lot to bring the social, economic and cultural pattern of life in the countryside closer to that in town and to overcome considerable differences between mental and manual labour. New possibilities arise for a fuller realisation of both parts of the formula of socialism: "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his work." Increasing opportunities are presenting themselves for putting on a new foundation the people's everyday life, the mainstay of all kinds of vestiges of the past. Only socialism is undertaking to use the increasing amount of leisure time and high living standards for the good of man and society. Only socialism can and must set an example by rationally interfering in the complex processes of the biosphere and solving the acute problem of scientifically regulating the relations between man and nature.

In the last quarter of the century Soviet literature will be playing an important and ever increasing role in society's efforts to accomplish all these tasks.

Soviet society gave the world a literature whose revolutionary purport is embodied in its artistic interpretation of the vast experience of socialist construction and its solution of pressing world problems. It is a literature capable of soberly assessing social achievements, facing up to all the alarming problems of our age, and helping man on his way forward. It gives him the ideological, moral and emotional resources to promote communist ideals. This literature is capable of achieving a new and subtler unity of things great and small in a broad epic canvas of human life at this crucial point of history.

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